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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000f752>

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THE CAPTURE OF MAMETZ WOOD

A study of Lloyd George's 'Welsh Army' at the
Battle of the Somme 1916.

Thesis submitted for the degree of M. Phil.
in History

by Albert Colin Hughes
M.Sc., B.Sc., (London).

Submitted May 1975
Awarded Oct. 1975.

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ABSTRACT

The Battle of the Somme, 1916, provided a severe and bloody test for the inexperienced units of Kitchener's 'new' volunteer armies, among them the 38th (Welsh) Division which had been raised by Lloyd George in 1914 in an ambitious, but unsuccessful, attempt to create a Welsh Army Corps of two divisions.

The Welsh Division went to France in December 1915 under the command of Major General Ivor Philipps, Liberal MP and political acquaintance of Lloyd George. The division's early training had given it the appearance of a smart, well disciplined force and both the divisional commander and Lloyd George were confident that it would distinguish itself in battle.

After six months in the trenches near Neuve Chappelle, the division marched to the Somme where, for its first major attack, it was given the formidable task of capturing Mametz Wood, on rising ground between the German first and second lines. This wood, the largest on the Somme, was defended by regular troops and reservists of the 3rd Guards Division, the cream of Germany's highly professional army. The Welsh Division, by contrast, consisted of wartime volunteers, unskilled in offensive tactics, untrained in woodland fighting.

A half-hearted first attack failed, as much the result of poor handling from above as of German opposition. Philipps was relieved of his command. At the second attempt, the division captured the wood after two days bitter fighting. But its performance did not satisfy the Corps commander and the division emerged from the battle with an indifferent reputation - which was not shaken off until the division had proved its worth at Pilckem Ridge in 1917.

This study examines the difficulties which it faced at Mametz Wood, and shows that the Welsh Division did remarkably well, without getting the credit it deserved.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The stimulus for this study came from the work of two distinguished survivors of the fighting at Mametz Wood: Wyn Griffith and David Jones. I received from both much kindness and encouragement. My frequent visits to Mr Jones at Harrow were brought to an end only by his sad death in 1974.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Arthur Marwick for his patient supervision and unfailing help. I hope that some, at least, of his expertise has rubbed off. I am also indebted to my colleague Mr T.G.T. Taylor for his enthusiastic support and for suggesting many improvements to the text. The Chief Librarian of the Ministry of Defence (Central and Army) Library, Mr J. Andrews, kindly provided facilities for research, and members of the library staff, particularly Mr C.A. Potts and Mr D.T. Bradley, gave willing help at all times.

Thanks are also due to my brother, Mr L.P. Hughes, who travelled many miles on my behalf to talk to survivors of the battle; to Mr R.L. Joseph for his expert translations from German Regimental histories; and to Miss P. Cavalier who typed the manuscript with care.

My greatest debt is to my wife, Gillian, who took on extra domestic burdens without complaint and helped in other ways too numerous to mention.

Finally, I would like to thank those survivors of the fighting who responded so generously to my enquiries. To them, and to others who fought at Mametz Wood, this work is respectfully dedicated.

Today I found in Mametz Wood
A certain cure for lust of blood

Robert Graves: , Dead Boche

CHAPTER ONE. The New Armies

Pick those knees up
Throw those chests out
Hold those heads up
Stop that talking
Keep those chins in
Lef, left lef' - lef' righ' lef' - you Private Ball it's you
I've got me glad-eye on.

Austria declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914. Within days, Russia and Germany mobilised their forces. On 2 August, news reached the British Government that German troops were massing on the Belgian frontier. The next day, the Lord Chancellor, Richard Burdon Haldane, went to the War Office, and, on behalf of the Prime Minister, who was also Secretary of State for War, sanctioned mobilisation of the Expeditionary and Territorial Forces.¹ Just after midnight on the night of the 4th August the Foreign Office made the following announcement:

Owing to the summary rejection by the German Government of the request made by His Majesty's Government for the assurances that the neutrality of Belgium will be respected, His Majesty's Ambassador at Berlin has received his passports and His Majesty's Government have declared to the German Government that a state of war exists between Great Britain and Germany as from 11 pm on the 4th August.²

The machinery of mobilization worked smoothly and during the second week of the war four regular infantry divisions and one cavalry division crossed to France to take up their position on the French left.³ Two more regular divisions were held ready in Britain. Within the same short period of time the 14 divisions of the Territorial Force, Britain's part-time soldiers, had mobilized for home defence. That such a relatively large army - the largest ever assembled in Britain at the outbreak of war - could be made available in such a short time owed much to the timely reform of army organisation which Haldane had himself introduced a few years earlier.

The Haldane Reforms

Haldane became Secretary of State for War in Campbell-Bannerman's Liberal administration in December 1905. It was not a much sought after position. 'Nobody', observed Campbell-Bannerman,⁴ 'would touch it with a pole'. This is not surprising. The Boer war, which had ended less than four years earlier, had exposed the Army's shortcomings for all to see and its reputation in the country was still at a low ebb. Furthermore, the new administration was wedded to reducing expenditure and money was unlikely to be available to finance the necessary improvements. On the contrary, most members of the Government could be expected to demand substantial reductions in Army spending to pay for social reforms.

Haldane was not the sort of person to be put off by these apparent difficulties. To him, improvements and economies were not mutually exclusive. He was confident that by seeking out first principles and measuring everything against them - a procedure which had served him well during his successful career at the Bar⁵ - he would be able to achieve both objectives. Within three months his ideas had taken sufficient shape for him to make a small, but nevertheless politically significant, reduction in Army Estimates and to speculate in the House of Commons on a form of military organisation in which part-time soldiers would play a larger part than ever before.⁶ The answer, he explained later, was to organise the large standing army at home - whose size had hitherto been governed by the need to provide drafts for India - into a smaller, but much more efficient, striking force and to use part of the money thus saved to provide an effective auxiliary army of part-time soldiers to back it up in times of war. In this way, Haldane reasoned, the size of the Standing Army at home could be reduced, and the necessary economies found, while the strength and efficiency of the army as a whole would be increased.⁷ Underlying this plan was the assumption that the Regular Army would play no part in home defence, which would be left to the Royal Navy and the new auxiliary forces. But although in all his speeches at this time Haldane laid great stress on the need for economies, he had other reasons, which he did not mention in the House, for seeking to reform the military organisa-

tion. Soon after assuming office he had been warned by Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, of persistent reports that Germany might invade France and it had been suggested to him that he might suddenly be asked what he could do to help.⁸ His strike force - later to be known as the Expeditionary Force - was therefore designed to meet this possibility. For this, Haldane decided that he required six fully equipped infantry divisions - the number which could be provided from the existing Standing Army at home with a few battalions to spare - and one cavalry division. This force was to be capable of being despatched to France within 15 days compared with the two months or so which studies had shown to be the minimum required, under existing plans, for a much more modest force.⁹

Haldane's plans inevitably ran into opposition. It was no easier then, than now, to disband regimental battalions without ruffling a few feathers and his proposals for reducing the size of the Regular Army, modest though they were, provoked sharp reaction in high places. Haldane did not yield. 'Our mandate from the country', said his Under-Secretary of State, the Earl of Portsmouth, bluntly, 'is to spend less money, therefore we must have fewer men'.¹⁰ But Haldane moved more cautiously when he came to organise the existing auxiliary forces - the Militia, the Volunteers, and the Imperial Yeomanry - into an effective second line army. Each was jealous of its independence, and each had powerful supporters in Parliament. A year passed before he was ready to forward a Bill for the Creation of the Territorial Army. But although he trod warily, and was careful to explain his ideas at every step, his plans met with criticism. During the Second reading of the Bill, Mr Wyndham, for the Opposition, moved that

This house, though anxious to increase the capacity for expansion of the Forces of the Crown in time of war, regrets that the government should make proposals which, while destroying the Militia, discouraging the Yeomanry and imposing new and uncertain liabilities on the Volunteers, would not, in a period of national peril, provide an adequate force for home defence, or prompt support for the Regular Army in the field.¹¹

Haldane's main problem was the Militia. Although this body had a long and honourable history it had failed completely to move with the times. Units turned out for training once a year

but otherwise might not have existed. The long period of training - 28 days - effectively closed its doors to all except land owners and their agricultural workers and there was in consequence little potential for growth. It was also expensive since Officers and men received full Army rates of pay during training and each unit was well supplied with regular Officers to supervise the training. Furthermore, there was considerable uncertainty about the role of the Militia which had tended over the years to degenerate into a recruiting organisation for the Regular Army, providing as it did, a means whereby potential recruits could savour something of Army life before taking the final plunge. Haldane sought to regularise the position by moulding the Militia into Reserves for the Regular Army leaving the Volunteers and Yeomanry to form the basis of his Second Line Force. When the Commanding Officers of the Militia refused to accept this role, he went ahead without them and the old Militia passed away. Its place was taken by the newly created Special Reserve, whose members accepted liability for immediate call to the colours in times of National emergency, and to which many officers and men of the Militia transferred.

The Volunteers and Yeomanry proved less of a problem. The former, essentially a middle class organisation based on the drill hall, had many of the qualities which Haldane wanted for his second line force. They trained regularly and they were cheap, although like other auxiliaries they lacked the supporting organisations - transport, medical services etc - essential to a modern army. There were some grumbles about pay but Haldane promised another 9d per man per day in camp¹² and they were soon won over. The Yeomanry - a privileged force of landed Gentry and tenant farmers who trained as cavalry and mounted troops - likewise offered no resistance and became, eventually, the mounted troops of the Territorial Army.

In spite of opposition by supporters of the Militia, the Territorial and Reserves Forces Bill went through almost without amendment and became law in August 1907. The Territorial Force came into existence formally in April 1908 and soon built up to 14 well organised Infantry Divisions and 14 Cavalry Brigades,

complete with all supporting services. Haldane formed County Associations under the Lords Lieutenant to handle recruiting and general administration but placed training under centralised military control to ensure adequate professional standards. No one, however, pretended that this part-time force could be made immediately ready for war. Peace time training - 15 days a year in camp plus drill hall attendances- could not possibly bring it up to fighting trim, so it was planned from the start that the mobilisation of the Territorial Force would be a mobilisation not for war but for six months of intensive training during which time the responsibility for home defence would rest mainly with the Fleet.¹³

Haldane left the War Office in 1912 but his organisation - 'my old organisation' as he liked to call it - remained more or less unchanged until the outbreak of war as did the plans he had drawn up for mobilisation. In essence, these envisaged that at the outbreak of war the first and second battalions of each regiment - one at home and the other on garrison duty abroad - would be quickly brought up to fighting strength from the reserves, the home battalion taking its place in the Expeditionary Force. Third battalions would be formed from the Special Reserve and these would take over the regimental depots and be responsible for supplying drafts to the fighting units to make good an estimated wastage of 80% per annum.¹⁴ The Territorial Force would begin training and later take over home defence, or, as Haldane confidently expected volunteer for garrison duties abroad to release regular battalions for the front.

Lord Kitchener

In the summer of 1914 the British Government, preoccupied with Ireland and concerned at the possibility of civil unrest at home, was slow to recognise the danger signs in Europe. Even when it did, the prevailing mood was to stay out of a Continental war at almost any price. In the few days of intense diplomatic activity which followed Austria's declaration of war on Serbia, Sir Edward Grey worked hard to prevent war altogether but on 30 July, suspecting Germany's motives, he began to turn his attention towards the possibility of war.¹⁵ The Cabinet however was

deeply divided and incapable of reaching any decision. On 3 August, Sir Edward Grey in a long and rambling speech in the House of Commons appealed to each member to 'search his conscience' on the matter of Britain's obligation to France and reach his own conclusion. He dusted down Britain's complicated treaty with Belgium and spoke of a moral, if not a legal, obligation to go to that country's defence. He also spoke of Britain's own self-interest. 'If we were to say that all those things mattered nothing, were as nothing, and to say that we would stand aside, we should, I believe, sacrifice our respect and good name and reputation before the world, and should not escape the most serious and grave economic consequences.'¹⁶ Even those who had been inflexibly opposed to intervention saw that it was now inevitable, and Britain went to war.

Throughout this time, the country was effectively without a Secretary of State for War, Asquith having combined the post, temporarily, with the office of Prime Minister after the Curragh incident some months earlier. It became imperative, therefore, to appoint a new Secretary of State for War. Asquith himself favoured Haldane because of his great experience at the War Office and because he had the confidence of senior officers who would be serving in the field.¹⁷ This possibility, however, brought loud protests from The Times which was deeply suspicious of Haldane's fondness for Germany and all things German. 'It is necessary' The Times declared, 'that the Army should be in firm hands of a man in whom the public have confidence; and we do not know where we can find any head for the War Office who would more completely secure this confidence than Lord Kitchener.'

And with some shrewdness, considering subsequent events, The Times added: 'It is true that he has not an intimate acquaintance with the Army at home (but) Lord Kitchener is a capable administrator and a first rate organiser. He can also improvise new measures and deal faithfully with red tape.'¹⁸ Haldane himself recommended Lord Kitchener and on 6 August, to the delight of The Times and most of the population, Asquith announced that Kitchener had agreed to become Secretary of State for War, 'without in any way identifying himself with any set of political opinions'.¹⁹

Few people in the country had ever set eyes upon Kitchener, but his reputation as a soldier and administrator was immense. Conqueror of the Sudan, Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, reformer of the Indian Army and ruler of Egypt, he had become almost a legend in his own lifetime - and the Liberal Government assumed that his appointment would inspire confidence and improve their own image in the public mind.²⁰ At first, the general expectation was that the war would soon be over. Kitchener however brought to his post the conviction that the war would be fought on a massive scale and would last for many years.

The British Army, he firmly believed, was quite inadequate for this task. He made little allowance for the difficulties which his predecessors, in time of peace, had faced in shaping an instrument for war, and he regarded their achievements with contempt. The Expeditionary Force might be well organised and well equipped but it was ridiculously small. 'I am put here to conduct a great war' he said 'and I have no army'.²¹ His view of the Territorial Army was equally jaundiced. He completely ignored its enthusiasm and its potential for growth and saw only that it was under strength, partly trained and poorly equipped. Furthermore - and this seemed to damn it completely in his eyes - it was a 'Town Clerk' army, not fully under War Office control. Kitchener determined, therefore, to raise his own armies, building firmly on the foundation of the Regular Army.

The New Army

Kitchener had arrived at the War Office on 6th August. That evening, Asquith asked Parliament on his behalf 'for the army, power to increase the number of men of all ranks, in addition to the number already voted, by no fewer than 500,000'. The contrast with Haldane could not have been more marked. It had taken Haldane more than 18 months of persuasion and negotiation to obtain parliamentary sanction merely to reorganise the Auxiliary Forces. It took Kitchener less than one day to obtain similar authority for the creation of an entirely new army of unprecedented size, and the only argument put forward in justification was that it was being done 'at his request'. Such is the stimulus of war.

It was Asquith's belief that public opinion was not ready for conscription and Kitchener though he would have liked conscription, accepted this. On 7 August he appealed for 100,000 volunteers to join the Regular Army for three years 'or the duration'.²² The response was immediate and recruits came pouring in. The normal recruiting machinery, which had been built to cope with 30,000 recruits a year was swamped with as many in less than a week.

'All the air was ringing with rousing assurances', C E Montague later recalled, 'France to be saved, Belgium righted, freedom and civilization rewon, a sour, soiled, crooked old world to be rid of bullies and crooks and reclaimed for straightness, decency, good-nature, the ways of common men dealing with common men. What a chance!' ²³ At the London recruiting office in Great Scotland Yard the crowd of applicants was so large that mounted police had to be called in to control them. Additional recruiting offices were quickly opened to deal with the flood and by late August the first 100,000 men had been obtained. During the first week in September recruitment was running at the phenomenal level of 30,000 a day and it soon became necessary to ask Parliament to sanction the addition of another half-million men.

Meanwhile, Kitchener's plans for the army took shape. Little needed to be done about the Expeditionary Force except to re-inforce it as quickly as possible with other units of the Regular Army. Arrangements were made to relieve troops on garrison duty abroad with units of the Indian Army and by this means two more Divisions - the Seventh and Eighth - were made available for France. The Territorial Army, however, posed special difficulties. Kitchener has been criticised for not using this Force as a basis for expansion but, in truth, the Territorial Army needed to be reorganised before it could be ready for this role. For although Haldane had prided himself on his impeccable logic, the role of the Territorial Army was, in some respects, as uncertain as had been that of the old Militia which he had been so quick to condemn. The Territorial Army had been raised ostensibly for home defence and there was no obligation on its members to serve overseas. Haldane however had also seen it as a possible means of expanding the Expeditionary Force and he had been confident - rightly, as it turned out - that in an emergency there would be no shortage of volunteers for foreign

service. He failed, however, to take account of the divisive effect this would have on individual units, each of which would be bound to have its proportion of men unwilling, or unable, to serve abroad. Kitchener's first step, therefore, was to ask the County Associations to designate some units as home service units 'to receive all those who cannot volunteer for foreign service into their ranks' and from which those 'who have not such important ties at home' would transfer to units selected for foreign service. Arrangements were also made to match the training to the new role with the aim of bringing the units designated for overseas quickly up to a 'standard of efficiency which would enable them to do credit to the British Army on foreign service'.²⁴ Under these arrangements, the move of Territorial Divisions overseas began in weeks rather than months, the first being used to relieve regular troops in the Mediterranean, Egypt and India, thus enabling three new regular divisions - the 27th, 28th and 29th - to be formed. A few selected battalions were also sent to France, in the first 2 or 3 months of the war, to be brigaded with Regular Battalions, although full Divisions were not sent until the spring of 1915. Even so, this was months before the first New Army Division was ready to take the same road. Once these decisions had been taken, the Territorial Force was ready for expansion. On 21 September 1914, County Associations were authorised to form a 'second line' T F unit for each original unit accepted for Imperial Service ie for each unit in which at least 60% of the strength had volunteered to serve overseas. By this means, the size of the Territorial Force was almost doubled. At first these new units were intended for Home Service to replace Imperial units moving overseas, but as new recruits automatically accepted liability for Imperial Service the inflexibility of the Territorial Force in this respect gradually disappeared. By the end of the war, 22 of the 28 first and second line divisions had served overseas.²⁵ This expansion took place, of course, in competition with the formation of the New Armies and, given the attention and publicity lavished upon the latter, it is not surprising that the Territorial Force came off second best. For every recruit joining the Territorials, at least 2 went to the New Armies.²⁶

Within days of launching his appeal for 100,000 volunteers, Kitchener had decided on the framework for his New Armies.

Army Orders issued on 16 and 21 August 1914 authorised the addition to the Army of 6 infantry divisions, the new battalions of which 'will be raised as additional battalions of the Regiments of the Line and will be given numbers following consecutively on the existing battalions of their regiments. They will be further distinguished by the word 'Service' after the number eg:-

8th (Service) Bn The Royal Welsh Fusiliers'.²⁷

Thus was born the First New Army.²⁸ Equal in size to the Expeditionary Force itself - 80 new battalions of the Regiments of the Line organised into 6 named infantry divisions (eg 9th Scottish) plus Army Troops - it was impressive enough on paper. In reality, of course, it was nothing more than a collection of raw recruits (the 'first hundred thousand' as they liked to call themselves), without uniforms or military equipment of any kind. More New Armies were formed as the recruits came streaming in. The Second, authorised on 11 September was almost an exact replica of the First, being made up, in the main, from the second 'Service' battalion of the same line regiments. The same distinguishing titles for the Divisions were used - 15th Scottish, for example. A Third New Army was authorised 2 days later but the practice of naming divisions had to be dropped because recruiting varied so much from one part of the country to another. A Fourth New Army quickly followed, and then a Fifth. In all, 30 Infantry Divisions were raised in this way, every one of which eventually saw service overseas, as the following table shows:

<u>New Army</u>	<u>Divisions</u>	<u>1st Theatre of War</u>
1st (K1)	9th (Scottish)	France
	10th (Irish)	Gallipoli
	11th (Northern)	Gallipoli
	12th (Eastern)	France
	13th (Western)	Mediterranean
	14th (Light)	France
2nd (K2)	15th (Scottish)	France
	16th (Irish)	France
	17th (Northern)	France
	18th (Eastern)	France
	19th (Western)	France
	20th (Light)	France
3rd (K3)	21st	France
	22nd	France
	23rd	France
	24th	France
	25th	France
	26th	France
4th* (K4)	30th	France
	31st	Egypt
	32nd	France
	33rd	France
	34th	France
	35th	France
5th* (K5)	36th (Ulster)	France
	37th	France
	38th (Welsh)	France
	39th	France
	40th	France
	41st	France

*Second formations. In April 1915 the divisions of the original Fourth New Army were broken up to provide reserves for the other New Armies. The original Fifth New Army then became the Fourth, and a new Fifth was added.

By the Spring of 1915, the British Army contained 70 Infantry Divisions; 11 Regular, 28 Territorial, 30 New Army and a Naval Division, and remained more or less at this strength throughout the war.²⁹ The size of this force may be gauged from the fact that an infantry division on the move occupied about 15 miles of road space.³⁰

Lloyd George and the 'Welsh Army'

In Wales, there was an even greater rush to arms than elsewhere. With a population less than 5% of that of Britain as a whole on which to draw, the 3 Welsh regiments of the line - the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the South Wales Borderers and the Welsh Regiment - each with two regular battalions at the outbreak of war, supplied between them no less than 25 infantry battalions for the 5 New Armies: 7% of the total.³¹ In addition, these regiments provided territorial battalions for the Welsh Territorial Division (one of the fourteen original territorial divisions) and for its second line derivative,³² as well as a few pioneer battalions for the New Armies and numerous infantry battalions for the Reserve. Nor was the contribution by Wales confined to units bearing the name of the Principality. Welshmen also enlisted in large numbers in the various technical Corps; in the Royal Artillery; and in those English regiments which had looked for some years to Wales for a large proportion of their recruits. About half the regiment of Grenadier Guards, for example, was said to come from Wales.³³

Towards the end of August 1914, when recruiting was at its height and the War Office machine was in danger of being overloaded, Lord Derby offered to raise, organise and administer local battalions in Liverpool until such time as the army could take them over. The offer was gladly accepted and the idea soon spread. Manchester and Liverpool between them produced enough infantry for a complete division.³⁴ Local committees sprang up in other cities and towns to raise similar battalions, which quickly became known as 'Pals' battalions. Most of the units of the fourth and fifth Kitchener Armies were raised, and provided for, in this way.

This development was to have a dramatic effect upon the pattern of recruiting in Wales. Not content with the few 'Pals' battalions which had begun to be raised on local initiative in Wales, Lloyd George called for a complete 'Welsh Army', a phrase which, however loosely used, implied a force of at least two divisions, ie 24 infantry battalions, plus supporting arms - artillery, transport, medical services etc. In an emotional speech before London Welshmen at the Queen's Hall, London on 19 September 1914, Lloyd George roundly condemned the Prussian Junker and called on 'Little Wales'

to continue to do her duty to 'Little Belgium' and Russia's 'little brother', Serbia:

I should like to see a Welsh Army in the field. I should like to see the race who faced the Normans for hundreds of years in their struggle for freedom, the race that helped to win the battle of Crecy, the race that fought for a generation under Glendower against the greatest captain in Europe - I should like to see that race give a good taste of its quality in this struggle. And they are going to do it.³⁵

Until August 2nd, Lloyd George had been an advocate of non-intervention. This speech heralded his strong support for the war effort and it was widely reported. The Times, not normally well disposed towards Lloyd George, was ecstatic, much to the latter's scornful amusement. Many of his colleagues thought it the best speech of his career and Sir Edward Grey is said to have wept when he read it.³⁶ This reaction was not unimportant, for Lloyd George needed the support of his colleagues in overcoming Kitchener's known hostility towards the creation of large Welsh (and Irish) formations. The issue was finally decided in Lloyd George's favour by the Cabinet.³⁷ On 23 September the South Wales Daily News announced that the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, had 'given his sanction to the formation of a Welsh Army Corps, which was urged by Mr Lloyd George in his speech on Saturday, and that a Provisional Committee has been formed for the purpose of carrying out the project'. Formal approval was given a few weeks later.

The first and only task undertaken by the Provisional Committee was to arrange a 'representative National Conference of leading men' at the Park Hall, Cardiff on 29 September.³⁸ Lloyd George went down to raise support for what he now described, with greater precision, as a Welsh Army Corps of two divisions. He aimed high in quality as well as quantity. 'It is important', he told his audience of Peers, Bishops, Politicians, employers and trade unionists, 'we should secure the cream of the youth of this country for the purpose of this army If we can only get the right type of young man to join we will have one of the most magnificent little armies ever turned out of this country. That is what we are aiming at'.³⁹

The conference passed a resolution that Wales, including Monmouthshire, should become a military administrative area for the purpose of recruiting the necessary men and that 'the National Executive Committee to reorganise the Welsh Army Corps, and advise and direct it, be and is hereby appointed'.⁴⁰

The reaction of the military authorities was understandably cool, much as they would welcome extra recruits. Army life is centred on the Regiment: there is no tradition of loyalty to the army as such, only to the Regiment and the Queen. The thought of a national army, particularly one raised by a politician, - and a Welsh politician, at that - naturally filled them with unease. The Cardiff Western Mail reported a Welsh Officer 'of considerable experience' as saying that 'as he understands the proposal Mr Lloyd George is not seeking to raise a complete Welsh Army Corps in the strict military sense of the term, but to enlist between 40,000 and 50,000 additional men in Wales to supplement the large contribution which Wales has already made to the Army You must bear in mind [the officer said] that in the regular army the best morale is the result of the esprit de corps which exists in regard to the maintenance of the honour of the regiment to which the men belong'. This is a curious interpretation to put on Lloyd George's speech. Lloyd George clearly had in mind an army in the field not merely a source of recruits to be distributed here and there as the occasion demanded. This difference of approach was to be the cause of continuing friction between the Welsh Army Corps Executive Committee and the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Command over the months ahead.

The committee however was not short of support. A certain Captain Vaughan, for example, wanted to go beyond a purely military force. 'A Corps of 40,000 men is a fine thing', he wrote. 'A single regiment of a thousand men [ie one battalion of a regiment] armed and equipped for war, is a thing far finer, for it would sweep the 40,000 out of existence in a single flash if the 40,000 were unarmed and unequipped If we wanted to do a fine thing which will make our work to be of tenfold effect

we must establish a Welsh Armaments and Equipment Company (Limited) in order to arm and equip our men ready for action'.⁴¹ Not surprisingly, this bizarre advice was not accepted.

But unfortunately for the Executive Committee, there was no immediate rush of recruits to the New Army Corps. Lloyd George's appeal had in fact come almost too late. By the middle of September there had been clear signs that the recruiting boom was over, and the Executive Committee, for all its propaganda and publicity (which included a visit to Cardiff by the Prime Minister) found it hard to reverse the trend. Some began to worry that Wales' reputation might suffer. 'Wales has a right to feel aggrieved - if you could have grievances in face of the present crises', said Sir Ivor Herbert in a recruiting speech for the Welsh Army Corps 'that from the National point of view she had given generously from her manhood, in the mass of the British Army, and that thereafter it might appear that Wales had really not done all she could have done, because there were thousands of Welshmen in regiments which had no connection whatever with their native land'.⁴² Later on, however, recruitment improved, stimulated partly by a special reduction of the minimum height requirement to 5ft 3 ins in recognition of the short stature of Welshmen and the authorisation of 'Bantam' Battalions with a minimum height of 5ft., and partly by news of the fall of Antwerp to the Germans. By the end of the year about 10,000 recruits had been found. Thereafter they came in at the rate of some 4,000 a month and by October 1915 the target of between 40,000 and 50,000 men had been reached.⁴³

Units of the Welsh Army Corps

Formal authority for the raising of the Welsh Army Corps by the Executive Committee had been given by the Army Council to the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Command on 10 October 1914, 'the units to be raised as Service battalions of the existing Welsh Regular regiments'.⁴⁴ By this time, thanks to the initiative of local committees, some units were already taking shape. A 'Pals' battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers formed at Rhyl on 2 October. A similar battalion of the Welsh Regiment raised at Swansea, had recruited 347 men by 10 October and was therefore up to one-third

strength. Another battalion of the Welsh Regiment, the 1st Rhondda, which formed on the 1 October as a K3 battalion, was diverted to the Welsh Army Corps at the Committee's request. At the end of October the Welsh Army Corps boasted 14 battalions, the 3 mentioned above and a second from the Rhondda Valley. By the end of the year this had increased to 12 battalions; enough to form the 1st Division:⁴⁵

<u>Battalion No.</u>	<u>Battalion Name</u>	<u>Recruiting & Source</u>
13th RWF	1st North Wales	Rhyl and surrounding areas
14th RWF	Caernarvon and Anglesey	Llandudno " " "
15th RWF	London Welsh	Welshmen in London
16th RWF	2nd North Wales	'Overspill' from 13th RWF
10th Welsh	1st Rhondda	Rhondda Valley
13th Welsh	2nd Rhondda	Rhondda Valley
14th Welsh	Swansea	Swansea and district
15th Welsh	Carmarthenshire	Glamorgan (mainly Porthcawl) and Carmarthen
16th Welsh	Cardiff City	Cardiff and district
17th Welsh	Glamorgan	men below the normal minimum height in Glamorgan
10th SWB	1st Gwent	Coalfields and ironworks of Monmouthshire
11th SWB	2nd Gwent	Monmouthshire coalfield; Brecon

On the 18 November the Committee announced the formation of the 3 infantry brigades of the 1st Division:

First Brigade (Brig-Gen. Owen Thomas), to be based at Llandudno, consisting of the above 4 battalions of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

Second Brigade (Brig-Gen. R.H.W. Dunn), to be based at Rhyl, consisting of 4 battalions of the Welsh Regiment: the 2 Rhondda battalions, and the Swansea and Carmarthen battalions.

Third Brigade (Brig-Gen Ivor Philipps), to be based at Colwyn Bay, consisting of the 2 battalions of the South Wales Borderers, and the Cardiff City and Glamorgan battalions of the Welsh Regiment.⁴⁶

Two of the new brigadiers, Owen Thomas and Ivor Philipps MP were founder members of the Executive Committee. The former certainly, and the latter, probably, owed his promotion (from Colonel to Brigadier) to Lloyd George. Frances Stevenson records a meeting at the War Office between Lloyd George and Kitchener at which Lloyd George suggested that the man whose name he thought might be put forward for the appointment of a General for the North Wales Brigade would not be at all suitable for the post. 'K agreed and asked C [Lloyd George] if he had anyone in mind. C suggested Colonel O.T. and K rather fell in with the idea. He asked where the Colonel was, and when he heard he was in the building, sent for him and appointed him Brigadier General on the spot. C said it was a most dramatic touch, and very magnanimous on K's part as he must have known that it was the Colonel who had been supplying C with complaints about the War Office and the Welsh Army Corps. C was very pleased with the appointment. The new Brigadier seemed dazed at the sudden elevation.....'.⁴⁷

The evidence that Lloyd George had a direct hand in the appointment of Ivor Philipps is less clear, although subsequent events leave little room for doubt. Within two months of becoming a Brigadier-General, Ivor Philipps received a further promotion to Major General in command of the 1st Division of the Welsh Army Corps. This was certainly Lloyd George's doing. 'I have seen Ivor Philipps and confirmed Gwilym's appointment with him if P. gets the Generalship of the Division', he wrote to his wife, 'Have seen K about that now and think it will be all right'.⁴⁸

Ivor Philipps had been Liberal MP for Southampton since 1906. Even allowing for the acute shortage of experienced regular officers, it seems remarkable that a politician who had ended his full time military career, in the Indian Army, more than 10 years before, should receive such rapid promotion to high command. Some clue to the choice may perhaps be found in an entry which Frances Stevenson made in her diary almost to the day on which Ivor Philipps took up his Divisional Command. Frances Stevenson records that Lloyd George had mentioned to her a great kindness shown to him many years earlier by Ivor Philipps' elder brother, Lord St Davids. At a time when Lloyd George's political and financial prospects

were at a low ebb, Lord St Davids had offered to lend him £500. 'C was mightily touched', she wrote, 'for he said the man had nothing to gain from this generous offer, nor could he know that C would ever be in a position to repay him. But although C did not accept the offer, yet he has never forgotten St. Davids' generosity and St. D will never ask him for anything in vain'.⁴⁹

The move to the North Wales coastal resorts began in December 1914. In London, the officers of the London Welsh battalion (the 15th RWF) were given a banquet to wish them 'God-speed'. Lloyd George found time to be present in spite of being heavily preoccupied with Cabinet business. He was, he said in proposing the toast, 'proud to be President of the battalion, and still more proud to find among the list of officers a young officer called Captain Richard Lloyd George'. He also hoped that 'there would soon be another Lloyd George among the Lieutenants of the battalion',⁵⁰ this latter being a reference to his younger son Gwilym, who transferred to the battalion a few weeks later.

On 31 December the citizens of Cardiff turned out 'in their thousands' to give a send off to the Cardiff City battalion which had broken its journey at Cardiff Station on its way from Porthcawl to Colwyn Bay. The reception at the end of the journey was equally enthusiastic. The Cardiff City battalion and the 1st Gwent were met at Colwyn Bay Station by town dignitaries and the clergy and were given, according to the Western Mail, 'a hearty reception'. The town was gaily decorated in their honour although this was hardly noticed in the pouring rain. At all three resorts the growing army of men was comfortably billeted by the sea. Hardly conducive to good training, their officers thought, but much appreciated by the troops. 'We are in clover' some of them said 'and cannot wish for greater comfort'.⁵¹

After 2 months marching and drilling - mainly on the sea front before a crowd of interested spectators - the units acquired enough 'soldierly bearing' to make a full scale review worthwhile. Lloyd George went up to inspect the 3 brigades and was suitably impressed. 'One of the most magnificent spectacles I have ever seen', he is reported as saying. Prominent in attendance were his 2 sons Richard and Gwilym, acting as aides-de-camp to

Generals Philipps and Thomas respectively.⁵²

About this time, too, other Divisional Troops were building up to full strength. Two Artillery Brigades of four batteries each were based at Pwllheli; another at Criccieth and a fourth at Portmadoc - all 40-50 miles away by road from the Divisional HQ at Colwyn Bay. They had no guns, of course, but practiced limbering up using pairs of old bus wheels fastened to long poles. Also in the Pwllheli/Portmadoc area were four companies of troops forming the Divisional supply train, and three Field Ambulance units, although the latter moved up to Prestatyn, and nearer to the Infantry, early in March. Three Field Companies of Engineers were even further away, at Abergavenny, on the South Wales' border.⁵³

But even as Lloyd George was enjoying his moment of minor triumph reviewing the infantry in North Wales, the writing for the Army Corps was on the wall. By the end of February it appeared to the Executive Committee that they would have the greatest difficulty in completing the second Division unless there was greater co-ordination of recruiting in Wales for the Regular Army, the Territorial and the Welsh Army Corps, and unless there was a concerted effort to get into much closer touch with the sources of recruits. They therefore proposed to the General Officer, Commanding-in-Chief Western Command that strong recruiting agencies should be established in each county and that attempts should be made to work out, in conjunction with the local employers, quotas for each county, of men who could be drawn into military service without injury to the industrial effort.⁵⁴ This imaginative proposal - which anticipated the official scheme for National Registration - drew a sharp response from General Mackinnon, in which he gave vent to his feelings about the Welsh Army Corps:

At present the Welsh Army Corps is looked upon as a unit and apart from any other Welsh troops, and orders have been given that all men who enlist in Wales are to go to the 43rd Division [then the official Army designation for the 1st Division of the Welsh Army Corps] in preference to [other] Service battalions. Pals battalions have been raised; the men are billeted in popular seaside resorts, and the Welsh Army Corps has been boomed by some of the most influential gentlemen of Wales, and last and by no means least, has had the personal advocacy of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

This outburst reflected the GOC's concern at the growing difficulty of maintaining the special reserve battalions which served the Welsh battalions fighting overseas, and which were being starved of recruits by the Welsh Army Corps. With growing losses at the Front it was now becoming more important to provide drafts for overseas than it was to form new battalions. He therefore proposed that all recruits enlisted for the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the South Wales Borderers and Welsh Regiment should be sent to the Special Reserve battalions of the Regiments to be drafted by the military authorities 'where their services are most required'.⁵⁵

At first, the Committee resisted, holding firmly to the view that there would be a marked falling off in recruits if the idea of a second Division were to be abandoned. By July, however, the Committee was having second thoughts and decided to submit to decision by the Army Council. Two months later, on 27 October 1915, the Committee assembled in London to hear the Army Council's verdict relayed by Lord Derby. In the words of the Committee's report: 'His Lordship stated that the War Office view was that new units were not then desirable, and that every effort was necessary for the recruitment of reserves. With this declaration, which the Committee accepted, recruiting for the Welsh Army Corps was brought to an end'.⁵⁶

Ironically, this decision came at exactly that point in time when the original recruiting target of between 40,000 and 50,000 men had been achieved. The 1st Division (by this time officially renumbered the 38th (Welsh) Division of the (New) 5th New Army) was fully up to strength and receiving final training in the south of England in preparation for its move to France. Seven other battalions had been formed, including a complete brigade of 4 'bantam' battalions which was later transferred to the 40th Division as the Welsh Bantam Brigade. The other three battalions passed to the Reserve.

Thus Lloyd George's dream of an Army Corps of two Divisions just failed to come true. If he had launched his campaign a few weeks earlier, when recruiting was at its height, the result might have been otherwise, although, of course, at the expense of other Kitchener armies. Still, the creation of a complete Division

was in itself no mean achievement, and with its descriptive title and all Welsh make-up, the 38th (Welsh) Division carried with it something of the aura of Lloyd George's 'Welsh Army'. Whether it would be 'one of the most magnificent little armies ever turned out' remained to be seen.

Training

In the opening months of the war, the Army faced the enormous task of training and supplying the vast new army of recruits, to bring it up to something like the pitch of the highly trained professional armies of the continental powers. Kitchener's critics maintained that it could not be done in time to affect the course of the war, pointing out that in peacetime, when the Army had little else to do, it took a year of hard training to turn a new recruit into an effective soldier. Now the army was fighting the greatest war of all time and recruits were pouring in at well over a hundred times the peacetime rate. Even those most closely involved found it a daunting experience. 'I was shocked by my first contact with the New Army', Guy Chapman wrote later. 'It was not so much the circumstances; the dull little south coast watering-place in winter; the derelict palazzo, the headquarters, facing on one side the tumbling grey sea and on the other an unkempt field; it was not the men in shabby blue clothes and forage caps with their equipment girt about them with bits of string; it was the obvious incapacity and amateurishness of the whole outfit which depressed'.⁵⁷

The most immediate problem was the shortage of regular officers. Those on leave from India were diverted at once to the New Armies and some others were kept back from the Expeditionary Force itself, but these were nothing like enough for the task. The first New Army did reasonably well in getting about 6 serving regular officers per battalion (ie about 6 per thousand men) but the subsequent Armies were lucky to have one regular officer in each battalion. The growing units of the 38th Welsh Division were no exception, and in common with other locally raised units of the fourth and fifth New Armies, had to resort largely to the use of 'dugouts' - retired ex-Regular officers - and part-time soldiers of the old militia, though the commanding officers of some battalions came from the Indian Army. The division also had more than its fair share of

Liberal MPs: Ivor Philipps in command of the division, and Hamer Greenwood and David Davies in command of the 10th South Wales Borderers and 14th Royal Welsh Fusiliers battalions respectively. All three attended meetings of the Executive Committee which was influential in filling senior posts. 'You will be glad to hear that I have recommended the appointment of Major V. Paget (retired R.H.A.) for the command of 1st Division Field Artillery', the chairman, Lord Plymouth, wrote to Lloyd George at one point. '.....Major Paget is my brother-in-law'.⁵⁸

Almost all the junior officers were new to the Army although some had received training of a sort in the Officer Cadet Corps which had been introduced into Universities and Public Schools in 1908 by Haldane. It was mainly on these junior officers and the NCOs that the burden of training fell. The Warrant Officers, Company Sergeant Majors and other NCOs were found wherever possible from among reservists and re-enlisted men so as to inject as much experience as possible at this level. To increase their numbers, the War Office raised the upper age limit for re-enlistment to fifty⁵⁹ but even this failed to meet the demand and many promotions had to be made from among the raw recruits. One new recruit to the 'Swansea' battalion, who had had some drill instruction in the Police Service before joining the Army, recalls being sent to Aldershot on a short, intensive course of Physical training and Bayonet fighting. On his return to the battalion he was immediately promoted to Sergeant and given the task of imparting to the new recruits all that he had learnt at Aldershot.⁶⁰

Uniforms and rifles were in short supply while industry geared itself up to meet the enormous increase in demand. Most of the Kitchener armies made do with 'horrible blue serge uniforms impossible to smarten up save by brass buttons',⁶¹ but for the Welsh Division the Executive Committee provided uniforms of brethyn-llwyd (a brown Welsh cloth) which were fairly smart and therefore popular. Rifles remained scarce however for over a year except for antiquated or sub-standard models suitable only for drill purposes. Other equipment was also in short supply and this severely limited the training programme. But

in spite of the difficulties; the shortage of equipment and the obvious lack of professionalism at all levels, the men were keen to learn. 'Friday was a very bad day for drilling or any outdoor exercising for the men of Cardiff City battalion at Porthcawl' reported the Western Mail on 5 December 1914. 'From early morning there were gales and heavy downfalls of rain that would drench one to the skin. The men have been in some cases drilled in small companies in the shelter of some high walls.'

With the move to North Wales, squad drill and platoon and Company training began in earnest. 'At the height of drilling time it is a great sight on the 'front' and one which attracts a large number of townspeople to watch the evolution', said one newspaper report. 'At one point the elementary stages of 'forming fours' etc. are in progress under the direction of one of the most exacting of instructors. In another position, squads are being instructed in the mysteries of Swedish drill. Again one comes across a group of men being put through a course of signalling and at other points various other exercises are being carried out.'⁶²

Rifle drill and bayonet practice soon followed. Some instruction was also given in the theory of musketry (rifle-shooting), although firing practice itself had to be deferred until suitable rifles were available. There was also plenty of route marching, so much so that in April 1915 the Cardiff City battalion, reporting a shortage of socks, blamed this on the amount of marching done by the battalion. Sometimes there would be mock battles at Company or battalion strength, in which a small force would be sent off in advance to take up defensive positions and scouts sent out to find them. A dummy attack would follow. On 15 December 1914, C Company of the London Welsh battalion defended the Little Orme at Llandudno against two other Companies of the battalion which had been ordered to attack that position. 'The men embarked upon their task with enthusiasm and negotiated many difficult obstacles in their endeavour to gain the heights' reported the Western Mail. 'Colonel Fox-Pitt, the Commanding Officer, who acted as umpire, was loud in his praise of the way the men had carried out the operations, especially the way they took cover'.⁶³

But these high-jinks fell a long way short of the preparation needed

for large scale war, and the disadvantage of having the divisional troops scattered across Wales soon became evident. Brigade training was difficult enough while the men were still in billets, but Divisional manoeuvres were impossible. By April 1915, there was already talk of a move to the Army training grounds in the south of England, but this had to be delayed until the camps there had been vacated by the first and second New Armies. These divisions began to move to France in July and by the end of August all units of the 38th (Welsh) Division (as it had then become) were gathered together in the Winchester area where more advanced Brigade and Divisional training could begin.

The shortage of rifles however, persisted until November. In the last few, frantic, weeks before embarkation each man was put through a hurried course on the rifle ranges on Salisbury Plain.⁶⁴ The Artillery was even less fortunate and had to delay its departure for France a few weeks in order to get in its first practice firings with live shells.

During these final stages of preparation, younger, more experienced officers - including some who had been wounded at the front and since recovered - took over many of the Brigade and battalion commands. A young, 37 year old Brigadier, L.A.E. Price-Davies, who had won the VC in South Africa took over the 1st Brigade (now renumbered the 113th) from Owen Thomas and another Regular Officer, T.O. Marden, who had taken the 1st Battalion of the Welsh Regiment to France with the Expeditionary Force, took over the 2nd Brigade (now the 114th) from Brigadier Dunn. The old 3rd Brigade (the 115th) however remained under the command of H.J. Evans, also a Regular Officer, but in his fifties, who had been promoted from command of the 4th District, Western Command, to succeed Ivor Philipps when the latter had taken over the whole Division.

On 29 November 1915, the 38th (Welsh) Division turned out in the rain for a drive past by the Queen - an inspection which signalled the end of its period of training. What shape was the Division in, on the eve of its departure for France? One participant, who remembers the occasion very well, has this to say:

'On the whole, training turned us into a fairly smart, well disciplined and efficient force; morale was good,

but I realised later that the training we received was related more to earlier wars, such as the South African Campaign, rather than the one in which we were about to engage'.⁶⁵

NOTES ON CHAPTER ONE

Epigraph: David Jones, In Parenthesis, London 1937 p.4

1. R.B. Haldane, Autobiography, London, 1929, p 276
2. Br Gen Sir J E Edmonds, History of the Great War based on Official Documents: Military Operations, France & Belgium, 1914 Vol 1, London 1922, p 29 (1933 Edition). (Referred to hereafter as Official History)
3. ibid.p.49. On 17 August 1914, the 1st and 2nd Divisions were East of Bohain, about 30 miles south of Mons. The 3rd and 5th Divisions were nearby at Landrecies.
4. Haldane, Autobiography, p 173
5. Haldane, Autobiography, p 183.
6. Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, House of Commons, 8 March 1906, Col 681.
7. Cmnd 2993 Memorandum on Army Reorganisation, 30 July 1906, p 4.
8. Sir F Maurice, The Life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan, London 1937, Vol 1, p 172
9. Haldane, Autobiography, p 188
10. Col J K Dunlop, Development of the British Army 1899-1914, London 1938, p 259.
11. Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, House of Commons, 9 April 1907, Col 83
12. Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, House of Commons, 23 April 1907, Col 1681
13. Harold Baker, The Territorial Force; A manual of its Law, Organisation and Administration; London 1909, p 89
14. Baker, The Territorial Force, p 88
15. Grey of Falloden, Twenty-Five Years, London 1925, ii p 177. See also Keith Robbins, Sir Edward Grey, London 1971 which gives much the same sequence of events. On p 291 Robbins states that up until 26 July, Grey was still playing as detached a role as possible 'before the pressure to commit Britain became inexorable' but that on 27 July, having heard that Austria had rejected the Serbian reply to her ultimatum, he became less optimistic and even spoke of 'some devilry going on in Berlin'.

16. Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, House of Commons, 3 August 1914, Cols 1809-1827. The quotation is from Col 1825.
17. Grey, Twenty-Five Years, p 286
18. The Times, 4 August 1914.
19. Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, House of Commons, 6 August 1914; Col 2082
20. Philip Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist, London, 1958. Penguin Edition p 333.
21. Viscount Esher, The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener, London 1921. p 35.
22. The Times, 7 August 1914.
23. C E Montague, Disenchantment, London 1922, MacGibbon & Kee edition, 1968, p 10.
24. Communication from Lord Kitchener to the County Associations and Officers Commanding Territorial Units. Quoted in The Times, 15 August 1914.
25. By analysis from A F Becke, History of the Great War based on Official Documents; Order of Battle of Divisions, London 1938.
26. Brian Bond, 'The Territorial Army in Peace and War', History Today. Vol. XVI, No 3 1966 p160. Bond states that in the first 18 months of the war, 726,000 joined the Territorials against 1,741,000 for the Kitchener Armies.
27. Army Order 324 of 21 August 1914
28. The New Armies were popularly known as 'Kitchener's Armies' and were designated K1, K2 etc. None of the Armies took to the field as such. Divisions were sent abroad as they became ready and fought alongside Regular and Territorial divisions.
29. Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, HMSO London 1922. Divisional Distribution Charts between pp 28 & 29.
For completeness, I have included the Royal Naval Division, raised by Churchill although, strictly speaking, it was under Admiralty, not War Office control at the time. A guards division was added later in 1915 and 5 Territorial divisions were added at the end of 1916. The maximum strength at any one time was 75 divisions (Spring 1917).

30. Edmonds, Official History 1914, Vol 1 p 486.
31. The number of Welsh battalions in the New Army divisions is taken by inspection from Becke: Order of Battle of Divisions. If infantry battalions alone are counted, the figure is 25 out of a total of 360 battalions which is almost exactly 7 per cent. If pioneer battalions are included the figure rises to 29 out of 390, or roughly $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. The percentages drop to 6.7 and 7.2 respectively if the London Welsh battalion of the RWF, which was not recruited in Wales, is excluded. The relative size of Wales, in terms of population, is based on 1911 census returns as quoted in I. Nicholson and T. Lloyd-Williams, Wales: Its part in the War, London 1919 p 26.
32. In 1908, under Haldane's reforms, the Volunteer battalions associated with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the Welsh Regiment became numbered territorial battalions bearing the regimental name. The Volunteer battalions of the South Wales Borderers however were completely renamed. One became the "Brecknock" battalion of the SWB, but three others were converted into an independent Territorial regiment, the Monmouthshire regiment which continued to be closely associated with the SWB. At first, the battalions of the Monmouthshire regiment were brigaded together in the Welsh Territorial Division but they were sent overseas to join other divisions very early in the war, and distinguished themselves at the 2nd Battle of Ypres in 1915.
33. Western Mail, Cardiff, 1st December 1914.
34. C T Atkinson, The History of the South Wales Borderers 1914-1918. London 1931, p 69.
35. South Wales Daily News, Cardiff, 22 September 1914.
36. A J P Taylor [ed.] Lloyd George: A diary by Frances Stevenson, London 1971 p 2.
37. David Lloyd George, War Memoirs, London 1933-36, p 452 (Odhams edition). Lloyd George says that when the proposal came before Lord Kitchener "he promptly vetoed it. The question was therefore raised by me in the Cabinet and there was a fierce fight. In the end the cause of the Welsh Division was carried". Lloyd George is not very precise on dates but agreement must have reached before official sanction was given by the War Office on 10 October 1914 (see note 44) and probably occurred sometime between Lloyd George's speech on 19 September and the newspaper announcement about Kitchener's agreement on 23 September 1914. Kenneth O. Morgan in Lloyd George: Family Letters 1885-1936 suggests that the row in Cabinet took place on 28 October, but this was more probably a row

about an Army order prohibiting the speaking of Welsh on parade which Frances Stevenson mentions in her diary (although she dates it at 29 October).

38. Welsh Army Corps Executive Committee Report 1914-1919
Cardiff 1921 (Referred to hereafter as WACEC) pp 4-6.
39. South Wales Daily News, Cardiff, 30 September 1914.
40. WACEC p 12.
41. Western Mail, Cardiff, 1 October 1914
42. *ibid.* 14 October 1914.
43. WACEC p 40
44. C H D Ward, Regimental Records of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers 1914-1918, London 1928 p 26.
45. Compiled from information in WACEC and in J E Munby:
A History of the 38th (Welsh) Division, Cardiff 1920.
46. South Wales Daily News, Thursday 19 November 1914.
(Later, the 17th Battalion RWF took the place of the 17th Battalion, Welsh Regiment in the third Brigade, the 17th Welsh being transferred to the fourth, 'bantam', Brigade. With this exception, the composition of the Division remained unchanged until 1918).
47. Taylor, Lloyd George: A diary by Frances Stevenson, p 8.
48. Kenneth O. Morgan [ed.], Lloyd George: Family letters 1885-1936, Cardiff & London 1973, p 175.
49. Taylor, Lloyd George: A diary by Frances Stevenson, p4.
Ivor Philipps took command of the Division on 19th January 1915. The quotation is taken from the entry in the diary for 25 January 1915. The italics are mine.
50. Western Mail, Cardiff, 2 December 1914.
51. *ibid.* 18 December 1914
52. *ibid.* 2 March 1915
53. Munby, A History of the 38th (Welsh) Divisions pp 5-10.
54. WACEC, p 25.
55. Western Mail, Cardiff, 3 May 1915.
56. WACEC, pp 28-29
57. Guy Chapman, A Passionate Prodigality, London 1933, p 13
(MacGibbon & Kee Edition 1965).

58. Lloyd George MS. Plymouth to Lloyd George, 13th December 1914.
59. B Williams, Raising and Training the New Armies, London 1918 p 69.
60. Richard Lyons, Letter to the author, 4 September 1972
61. Germaines, The Kitchener Armies, p 128
62. Western Mail, Cardiff, 14 December 1914.
63. *ibid.* 16 December 1914.
64. Atkinson, The History of the South Wales Borderers, p 177
65. Richard Lyons, Letter to the author, 4 September 1972.

CHAPTER TWO. France

You can hear the silence of it :
you can hear the rat of no-man's-land

Early on the morning of 1st December 1915, the leading battalions of the 38th (Welsh) Division marched through Winchester en route for Southampton, Le Havre and the British Expeditionary Force in France, the rest of the Division, less Artillery, following closely behind. They marched 'in an even drive of wind and rain, into a late afternoon that found us on a wet quayside, staring at a grey ship on a grey sea. Rain in England, rain in the Channel and rain in France; mud on the Hampshire Downs and mud in the unfinished horse-standings in Havre where we sheltered from the rain during the hours of waiting for a train'.¹ On the outskirts of Southampton the bedraggled troops had made an attempt to smarten themselves up and the bands played bravely as they marched through the streets towards the docks. They need not have bothered: after 16 months of war the sight of troops marching through the port had become so familiar to the inhabitants that nobody took any notice.² But in spite of foul weather and rough seas, there was no mishap and by 6th December 1915, 526 officers; 15,447 other ranks; 1,580 horses and mules; 526 horse-drawn vehicles; 515 bicycles; 70 lorries; 36 cars; 29 motor cycles and other paraphernalia of the Division were safely delivered to a billeting area 10 miles south of St Omer and about 30 miles behind the British front line.³ Here they joined the XIth Corps in the centre of the British 1st Army.

They moved at a time when the British supreme command, both civilian and military, was in disarray and British strategy in turmoil. 1915 had been a year of failures, principally in the Dardenelles where an attempt to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula had ended in disaster, but also on the Western Front, particularly at Loos in September. Field Marshal Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France, was in disgrace for mishandling that battle and for allegedly falsifying his dispatches. On 19th December he was recalled to England and replaced by General Sir Douglas Haig, commander

of the 1st Army, who was told by Kitchener to 'keep friendly with the French' and look upon General Joffre 'as the C-in-C in France, where he knew the country and general situation well'.⁴

Kitchener himself, however, was in difficulties having lost the confidence of his Ministerial colleagues on the War Committee who increasingly resented his autocratic and secretive ways - with some justification - and who now regarded him as a bad administrator.⁵ Lloyd George angled for his dismissal on the grounds that he had given the Cabinet wrong advice about the Balkans and had so mismanaged the munitions problem that failure on the Western Front had been inevitable; but Kitchener was still popular in the country and Asquith, as head of a shaky coalition could hardly take this step without risking his own position as Prime Minister. Instead, he prevailed upon Kitchener to allow the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to take his place as the Government's chief adviser on strategy, and suggested the appointment of Sir William ("Wully") Robertson - French's Chief of Staff in France - to the post of CIGS.⁶ Robertson himself was encouraged to dictate his own terms before accepting office.⁷ This he did to such effect that when he took up his appointment on 23rd December Kitchener was reduced to a mere figurehead, responsible mainly for recruiting and for clothing and feeding the Army.

Although military operations in 1915 had ended in failure, the outlook was not entirely gloomy, if only because Britain's military strength was increasing rapidly with every day that passed:

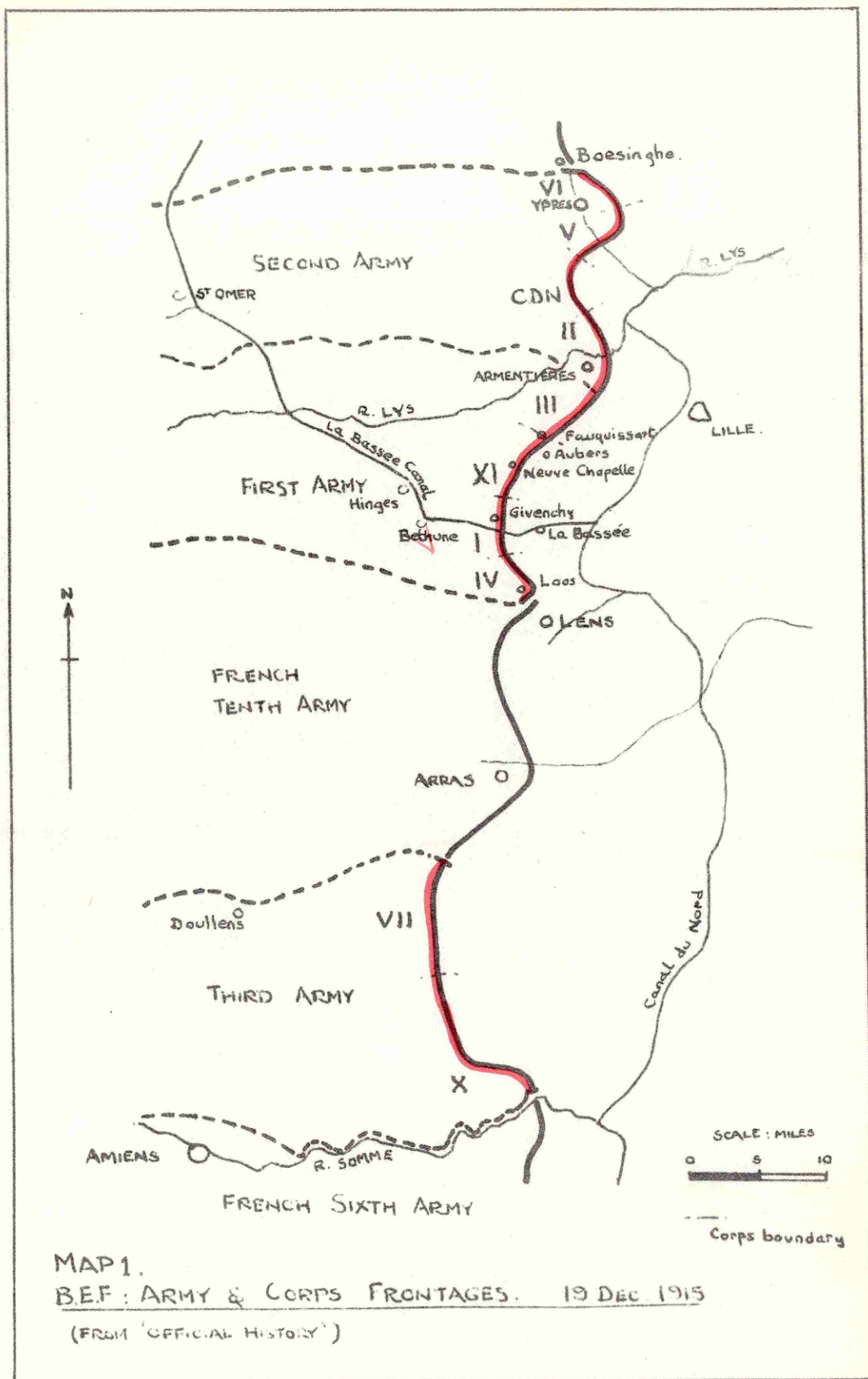
Like Pilgrim relieved of his burden, the nation, freed from the incubus of the Dardenelles, entered on the year 1916 on a note of hope. The new armies were rapidly putting on final touches and preparing to take the field. Many divisions had already been in action and behaved creditably. Others were fully prepared to outshine them. All over the country new munitions factories were sprouting up like mushrooms. Before the year was half spent what seemed an inexhaustible supply of heavy guns, light guns, machine-guns and munitions of all kinds would be pouring into the various theatres of war.⁸

Both Robertson and Haig were confirmed 'Westerners' believing that the Germans could be beaten only in Belgium or France. All other theatres of war were, therefore to be subordinated to the Western Front. During 1915, the British Expeditionary Force in France and

Flanders had grown from 10 division to 37 (including two from Canada),⁹ organised in three Armies, two (the First and Second) holding a continuous line from Boesinghe in Belgium, to Loos in the coal fields of Northern France, a third (the Third Army) being sandwiched between the French Sixth and Tenth Armies in an area north of the river Somme (see map 1). Robertson was determined that as many divisions as possible should be released from England to serve in France and that they should be joined by troops from the Dardenelles. To this end, he moved quickly to discontinue all engagements on the Gallipoli peninsula. The Cabinet, after wrestling with the problem for weeks, had already decided (27th December) that the beach-heads at Suvla and Anzac should be evacuated but that Cape Helles, the southernmost tip of the Peninsular, should be retained. Robertson would have none of this and ordered complete evacuation. He also instructed Murray, the Army Commander in Egypt, to reorganise the troops which were pouring into Egypt from Gallipoli and transfer them to France. Within 6 months, 9 of the best divisions in Egypt had been sent to France.⁶

On 28th December 1915 the War Committee accepted 'in principle' that British forces should be concentrated on the Western Front and that preparations should be made for a major Franco/British offensive in the spring to be carried out simultaneously with offensives on the Russian and Italian fronts - as had been recommended by an Allied Military Conference at Chantilly on 8th December. Some members of the Committee however had serious misgivings and the War Committee made it clear that their assent should not be 'construed as authority for undertaking the offensive'.¹¹ In spite of this reservation, Robertson was well pleased and wrote immediately to tell Haig the good news. On 13th January, however, he had to write again, to say that the decision had been further watered down by the Cabinet:

There is a fairly strong party in the Cabinet opposed to offensive operations on your front in the spring or indeed at any time. One wants to go to the Balkans, another to Baghdad, and another to allow the Germans to attack us. I have used all the arguments you or any other soldier would use, but not with complete success. In the War Committee decision I sent you a few days ago you will see that we are to make every effort "to prepare" for offensive operations in the spring. In the original draft I put we were to make



every effort to "undertake" offensive operations in the spring. By a decision made today (which I will send you later) it has now been watered down to the effect that we are to "prepare" for offensive operations in the spring "but without committing ourselves definitely to them".....
[some] people are trying to get their way by urging us to wait for an offensive until we are at full strength, which they say will not be until well on in the summer and amongst these people is Lloyd George who has received the Prime Minister's sanction to meet the French Munitions and Artillery Authorities in France to discuss with them how much ammunition they think they will want before they can be ready and how long it will take them to get it.¹²
This is the thin end of the wedge for deferring matters.

But whatever disagreement there might have been about the date of the coming offensive, the die was cast. 'Once authority was given to concentrate our maximum strength on the Western Front' to quote Lord Hankey, 'it was inevitable that the generals would lose no time in setting to work. Very soon our available resources would be irretrievably committed to and locked up in that theatre. When the French, Italians and Russians were all attacking on their respective fronts it would have been morally impossible for the British Supreme Command to refuse the co-operation of the forces at their disposal in accordance with the plans of the Allied generals'.¹³ In 1916 then, the weight of Kitchener's Armies was to be thrown against the Germans; and they would fight on the Western Front. It was against this background that the 38th (Welsh) Division, with many others, moved to France.

Apprenticeship in the line

The strength of the XI Corps when the 38th Division joined it in December 1915 was three divisions: two in the front line and one in reserve. The Guards Division held the left sectors of the Corps front north of Neuve Chapelle, and a New Army division - the 19th (Western) - the right sectors south of the village. The 46th (North Midland) Division, a Territorial unit, was in reserve at St. Venant having come out of the line a few days before the arrival of the 38th. The 46th Division was destined to move, against the general flow, from the Western Front to Egypt as soon as the 38th had gained sufficient experience to take its place.¹⁴ For the first four weeks in France, the 38th Division trained continuously for this role, both in and out of the line:

They did short route marches each day along winding ways saturated with continued rain. They did platoon-drill and arm-drill in soggy fields behind their billets.

They were given lectures on very wet days in the barn..... lectures on military tactics that would be more or less commonly understood. Lectures on hygiene by the medical officer, who was popular, who glossed his technical discourses with every lewdness.....

One day the Adjutant addressed them on the history of the Regiment. Lectures by the Bombing Officer: he sat in the straw, a mild young man, who told them lightly of the efficacy of his trade; he predicted an important future for the new Mills Mk.IV grenade just on the market; he discussed the improvised jam-tins of the veterans, of the bombs of after the Marne, grenades of Loos and Laventie - he compared these elementary, amateurish, inefficiencies with the compact and supremely satisfactory invention of this Mr Mills, to whom his country was so greatly indebted.

He took the names of all those men who professed efficiency on the cricket field - more particularly those who claimed to bowl effectively - and brushing away with his hand pieces of straw from his breeches, he sauntered off with his sections of grenades and fuses and explanatory diagrams of their mechanism stuffed into the pockets of his raincoat, like a departing commercial traveller.¹⁵

Bombing practice followed, at which most men threw at least one live bomb, and those selected to be bombers threw 10 or more. Faulty grenades and occasional carelessness in handling made this a hazardous exercise in which a number of officers and men were killed, and others wounded. On the rifle ranges, the most accurate shots were trained as snipers, while the rest practised to bring their firing rate up to 15 aimed rounds a minute - a fairly respectable rate of fire even if well short of the 30 rounds a minute which could be achieved by the best of the regulars in the pre-war army. The troops also learned the basics of field engineering; how torevet earthworks with sandbags and timber; how to drain and pump; how to construct new traverses and dug-outs. Machine-gun crews fired live ammunition for the first time and elementary training was given in gas warfare, all officers and men passing through a tunnel of gas wearing the primitive gas helmets of the time.¹⁶

Between 10th December 1915 and 6th January 1916, battalions were attached in turn to units of the two divisions in the front line to learn at first hand the business of trench warfare.¹⁷ Wyn Griffith has recalled his own feelings as he faced this initiation into the brotherhood of the trenches:

Less than 24 hours stood between us and the trenches; there were two kinds of men in the world - those who had been in the trenches, and the rest. We were to graduate from the one class to the other, to be reborn into the old age and experience of the front line, by the traversing of the miles over the fields of Flanders.¹⁸

The journey itself, across the churned-up, waterlogged valley of the Lys brought its own unpleasant experiences; unwelcome encounters with rotting corpses, huge rats and ice-cold water:

Appear more Lazarus figures, where water gleamed between dilapidated breastworks, blue slime coated, ladling with wooden ladles; rising, bending, at their trench dredging. They speak low. Cold gurgling followed their labours. They lift things, and a bundle-thing out; its shapelessness sags. From this muck-raking are singular stench, long decay leavened; compounding this clay, with that more precious, patient of baptism; chemical-corrupted once-bodies..... You step down between inward inclining, heavy bulged, walls of earth; you feel the lateral slats firm foothold. Squeaking, bead-eyed hastening, many footed hurrying, accompanying each going forward.

Break in the boards - pass it back: The fluid mud is icily discomfiting that circles your thighs.....

By contrast, the front line with its signs of homeliness, of a culture 'already developed, already venerable and rooted' was almost welcome:

You turn sharp left; the space of darkness about you seems of different shape and character; earth walls elbow at you in a more complicated way. You stand fast against the paradox.

And you too are assimilated, you too are of this people....¹⁹

The troops soon became absorbed in the dull routine of trench life: stand-to at dawn and dusk in case the enemy attacked in the half light, and at other times repairing trench walls, renewing barb-wire, carrying stores and ammunition, and 'scheming against the insidious attack of water'.²⁰ This work was mainly carried out at night:

Most of the daytime - invariably in the morning - the three lines, firing, support and reserve, were deserted except for a few sentries leaning against the parapet with periscopes handy, and for a sniper or two; everyone else was under cover, silent and, if possible, asleep. At dark a whole population suddenly appeared, literally out of the earth; working parties would set about draining, digging and wiring; from the rear, along the communication trenches, would come parties carrying rations, water, ammunition, sandbags, duck-boards, and everything imaginable. Behind these again the roads were packed with horsed wagons and limbers.... Then

dawn would approach, the trench garrison would stand to arms and be dismissed to begin another similar day.²¹

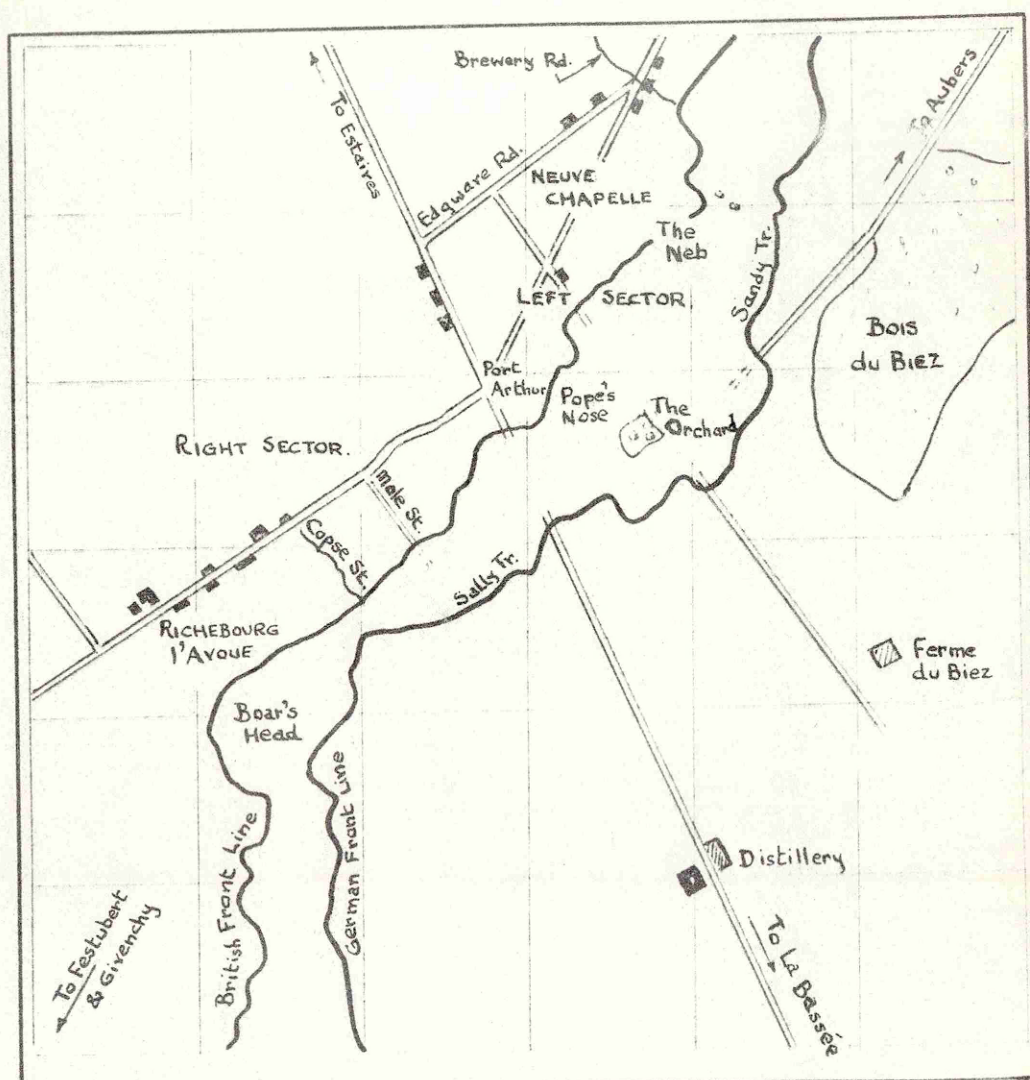
On Christmas Eve, the divisional Artillery began to arrive from England and by 27th December the division was complete. At about this time, the 46th Division departed leaving the 38th Division as Corps reserve. By 6th January, the training programme was over and two complete brigades - the 113th and 114th - moved into the line to relieve a brigade each of the Guards and 19th Divisions, still under the watchful eyes of experienced divisional commanders, but responsible, for the first time, for whole sectors of the front line system. On 12th January, the 113th Brigade had its first break with routine, making a demonstration with 200 plywood dummy soldiers 'as if getting over the parapet'.²² They repeated this ruse three times to represent three waves of infantry, while the artillery heavily shelled the German front line which, hopefully, the German infantry would be leaving their dugouts to defend. 'From the increase in rifle fire, it appears he reinforced his front line' wrote the XI Corps diarist, anxious to attribute a measure of success to this elementary piece of deception.

A few days later, the Corps Commander, Lt.-Gen. R Haking, satisfied with the division's progress, ordered Maj.-Gen. Philipps to prepare to take over the line from the 19th Division with these words of approbation:

Now that the 38th Division has completed its training in the trenches, and is about to take over half the front occupied by XI Corps, I wish to convey to all ranks my appreciation of the manner in which they have set to work to make themselves efficient

Although, of course, a good deal remains yet to be done, this Division has made more rapid strides towards efficiency than any of the several new formations that I have had under my command during the campaign.

Now that you are about to take over part of our line I anticipate with confidence that you will dominate the enemy in front of you; that your offensive spirit will be far superior to his; that your patrolling, sniping, trench mortar, bombing, infantry, Artillery and Engineer work will be better than his, and that with careful reconnaissance work and preparation you will shortly be able to continue the raids on his trenches which have already been carried out with such success by other Divisions of the Corps.²³



MAP 2. 38TH DIVISION SECTORS. 29TH JANUARY 1916.

0 500 1000
Scale: Yards.

This emphasis on ascendancy, on 'dominating the enemy in front', was common to most Corps and Army Commanders at that time, but General Haking - whose penchant for offensive action was to cause unnecessary slaughter on this front some months later²⁴ - was a particularly enthusiastic proponent. The theme recurs time and time again in the records of his frequent conferences with his divisional commanders, as being the most effective way of 'breaking the enemy's morale'. Junior officers were sceptical and wondered if the losses were justified. The troops had few illusions, preferring like the Germans and the French, a quiet life. The whole philosophy became something of a joke amongst them. Thus David Jones, describing the chaos which ensues when, unwittingly, a party of Royal Welsh Fusiliers runs into a German patrol at night:

The thudding and breath to breath you don't know which way, what way, you count eight of him in a flare-space, you can't find the lane [ie gap in the wire] - the one way - you rabbit to and fro, you could cry.....

We maintain ascendancy in no-man's-land.²⁵

At this time, however, there was a need to conserve ammunition for the coming offensive and extravagant raids and bombardments were discouraged. The line settled into a quiet routine of sporadic gun fire by day and reconnaissance patrols by night, perhaps two or three on each divisional front. 'Nothing to report', is a frequent entry in the 38th Division's diary. The following extract from a 38th Division Tactical Progress Report describes a typical day in January 1916.²⁶ Map 2 shows the area to which the report refers:

Tactical Progress Report No.7

Right Sector

In the fog, this morning, two Germans were seen approaching one of our posts in the Right Sub-Sector. The post with considerable restraint lay low, and "Hands upped" the Germans when they were within 30 yards. From reports at present to hand, it would appear that these men belonged to the 55th Guard Reserve Regiment.....

A listening post at BOAR'S HEAD located enemy's working party half way across no-man's land.....Yesterday morning at "STAND-TO" the Germans opposite COPSE ST-MOLE ST. were heard to shout several times "Who are you" while those further on our right shouted "You bloody murderers". This is eminently satisfactory if it indicates that our activity has been giving them a thin time... The M.G. mentioned in yesterday's report to be firing from the high breatwork behind BOAR'S HEAD did

not reply to the fire of our Machine Guns for the first time. An officer was observed through a telescope to come up and speak to a man near point 95/unidentifiable on Trench map⁷. This officer wore a coat closed up at the throat and had a high straight collar. His cap was shaped like ours, and was blue in colour with a red band round it. His face seemed very pale but he looked particularly clean.

Left Sector

A searchlight which we attempted to use on the ORCHARD did not prove a success, the beam not being apparently powerful enough. Strong wire is reported /south of the ORCHARD: two whistles were heard playing in the German lines. 'I've got my eye on you' appeared to be the tune. An Officer's patrol from THE NEB saw no signs of enemy work, but a strong enemy patrol was seen. Mining is suspected near THE NEB, the men reporting the noise being experienced miners. Necessary precautions have been taken and investigations are being made. Opposite the Right Sub-Sector, Left Sector, the enemy appears to occupy an old communication trench in NO MAN'S LAND as VERY lights were seen coming from it. Opposite the Left Sub-Sector, the enemy were laughing and talking and playing mouth organs during the early part of the night. An officer's patrol from THE NEB followed the willows to the wire near the German trenches. They heard talking and posts being hammered in, apparently in front of the parapet for wiring. On receipt of the patrol's report, machine gun fire was opened on the spot.

But although the front line was quiet, it was not without its hazards. Snipers' bullets and shell bursts on the one hand, and continual exposure to mud and water on the other, took a steady toll. During March and April the Swansea battalion alone drafted in 100 officers and men each month to make good its losses, equivalent to over 1,000 men a month for the whole division.²⁷ On 17th May, the division lost one of its most senior officers. Lt. Col. F. Gaskell, commanding officer of the 16th Welsh which he himself had raised at Cardiff, was mortally wounded when visiting his men at Colvin Crater. His second in command, Major Frank Smith took over the battalion.

In mid-February, the Guards Division transferred to the Second Army. The 19th Division replaced them in the line and the 35th Division joined the Corps to bring it up to strength. At the same time the whole Corps front moved southward, the 38th (Welsh) Division moving to Festubert where, for a while, they had all three brigades in the line together. At Festubert the ground was low lying and completely waterlogged. The front line consisted of a series of isolated posts called 'islands', each held by a

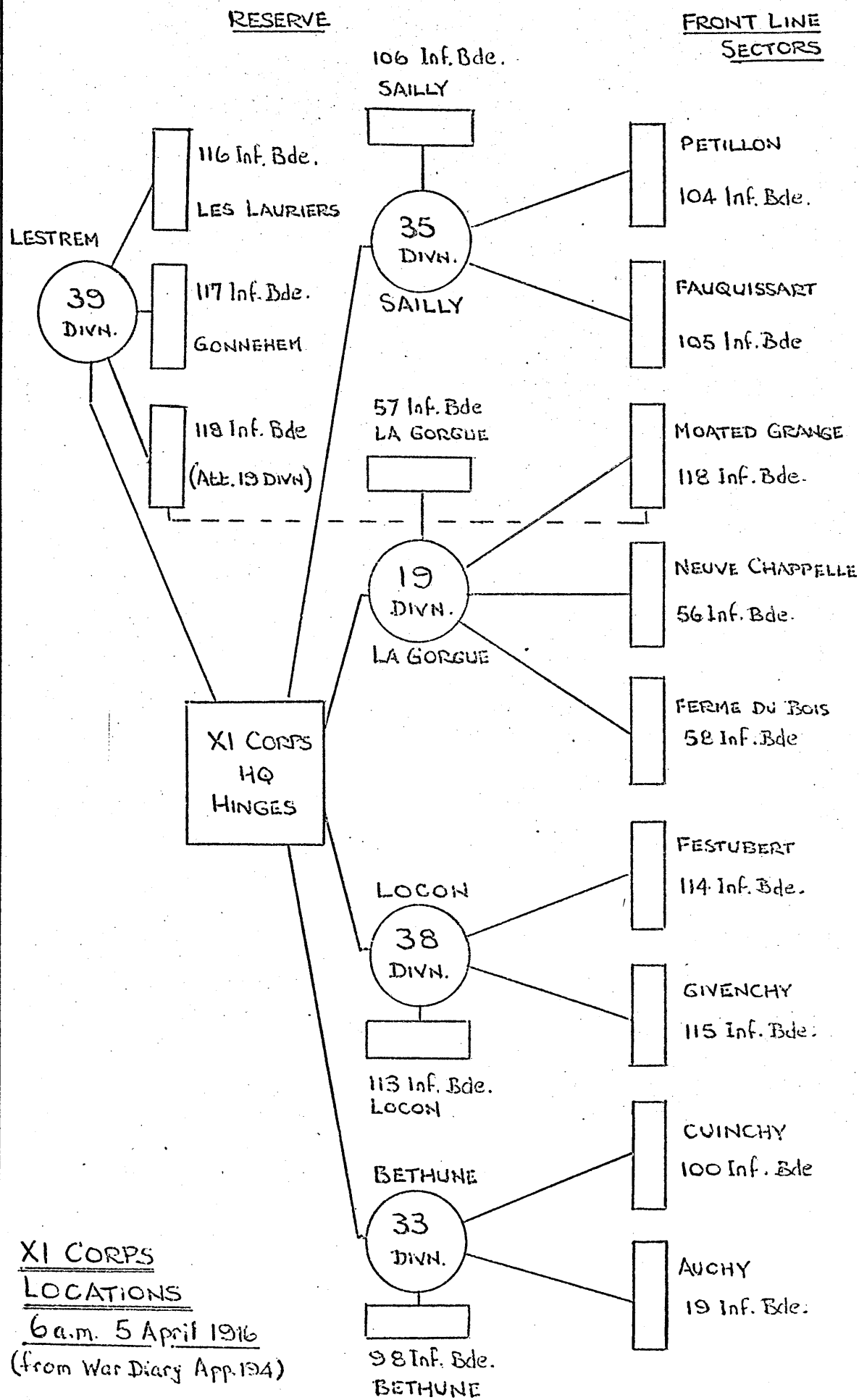
garrison of from 10 to 20 men. These posts were all that remained of a once continuous front line which elsewhere had been washed away. On the islands themselves the parapets were barely bullet-proof and dug-out accommodation was almost non-existent. Communication trenches were flooded and the islands could only be approached across open ground. As the German front line was only 200 yards away and on slightly higher ground the islands were virtually isolated by day. 100 yards behind the islands was a rudimentary support trench, again barely habitable, and further back the Old British Line (of 1915) where most of the front line fighters were garrisoned, though even this was broken down in places and sadly lacking in dug-outs. In these miserable conditions, the Welsh Division spent most of its time draining the land and improving the defences. There was little time for fighting.

A few weeks later, however, the Corps absorbed the 33rd Division, extending its frontage further southward to Cuinchy and Auchy beyond the La Basse Canal, and the 38th Division again shuffled south, exchanging the watery wastes of Festubert for slightly drier, but less restful surroundings at Givenchy. Givenchy was notorious as an area which was actively mined:

A mile to the north stood Festubert, where man fought more with water than with his fellow men; a mile or two to the south the trenches were dry, but on Givenchy hill there was no respite from fire or flood, nor from that devil's volcano of a sprung mine. To stand in the trench was to wait to be blown up, without warning, from below, or to be struck down by some terror from the sky in the shape of a bomb, grenade or shell.²⁸

The activity was not however all one-sided and at his conference on 8th March the Corps Commander congratulated the 38th Division on their activity on the GIVENCHY fronts which had resulted in their gaining 'ascendency' over the enemy.

At the end of March, the 39th Division, newly arrived from England, joined the XI Corps for training; bringing its total strength up to 5 divisions, all New Army, reflecting the preponderance of New Army divisions in France at that time. The diagram on the following page shows the Corps dispositions on 5th April 1916 - 9 brigades in the line, holding sectors from Petillon, near Laventie, in the north to Auchy in the south. Six brigades were in reserve.



Surprisingly enough brigades in reserve did very little formal training. Days were spent on fatigues or on working parties or what was euphemistically called 'company training' which seldom went beyond platoon and company drills.²⁹ A few specialists, and those chosen to raid enemy trenches, were given an opportunity to practice their skills, but not until the end of May were brigades asked to train larger formations,³⁰ and by then the coming offensive was only weeks away. Part of the difficulty was that the British army unlike the French, did not have a civilian work force so that infantry out of the line tended to be used as casual labour. This and the generally exhausted state of the men after a spell in the front line, left very little time for serious offensive training.

Plans for the Allied offensive in 1916

10 days after succeeding Sir John French, Haig attended a conference at the French headquarters at Chantilly. Not much was said about future plans for an offensive but the following day, 30th December 1915, Joffre wrote to say that he was studying, amongst other possibilities, the launching of a 'powerful offensive' south of the River Somme and he asked for views on the possibility of British forces joining in with a simultaneous attack on a wide front north of the river. He also pressed for the relief of the French Tenth Army (see Map 1) since its interpolation between the British First and Third armies would make for difficulties during such an attack.³¹ Haig was not anxious to use his divisions both to relieve the French army and to mount an offensive and he replied saying that although he would arrange to relieve the left of the French 10th Army he could not offer to do more without further study. On 20th January however General Joffre proposed a different arrangement, which was that the British should attack on a large scale north of the Somme as a preliminary to a weighty, and decisive, joint attack at a place and time still to be determined. In a letter sent a few days later he explained that what he had in mind for the British was a 'wide and powerful offensive..... with a minimum of fifteen to eighteen divisions' during April, followed, possibly, by another in May elsewhere on the British front.³² Haig would not agree and at a conference at Chantilly on 14th February, Joffre gave way. 'He admitted', Haig wrote in his diary, 'that attacks to prepare the way for the decisive attack

and to attract the enemy's reserves were necessary, but only some 10 to 15 days before the main battle, certainly not in April for a July attack. This seemed quite a victory for me'.³³ At the conference both Generals agreed that the French and British forces should attack 'side by side' with the French left placed just north of the River Somme.

On 21st February, the Germans pre-empted the Allied plans by attacking the French at Verdun. Haig immediately undertook to relieve the whole of the French Tenth Army which he did by putting in extra divisions to extend the First Army southwards and the Third Army northwards until they met near Vimy. A Fourth Army was formed under General Sir Henry Rawlinson on 1st March and this took over the front previously held by the right of the Third Army.

The German attack at Verdun did not weaken Joffre's enthusiasm for a joint offensive although it threw the date back into the melting pot. Joffre's attitude was in marked contrast to that of the War Committee in London which still showed a distinct lack of enthusiasm. Prompted by Robertson, Haig submitted his plans to the committee in early April and asked for authority to proceed. Asquith consented but with such obvious misgivings that Haig, at a meeting with Kitchener and Robertson some days later, was prompted to ask 'Did H.M.'s Government approve of my combining with the French in a general offensive during the summer?' He did not get a clear answer even then; just an indication that some prominent members of the Cabinet were on his side, but this was enough to enable him to proceed with his plans.³⁴

By early May, Joffre was beginning to think again in terms of July for the opening of the coming offensive, although he realised that this was probably the earliest date on which it could begin. Haig would have preferred an even later date to allow the British army to build up to full strength, but when he mentioned this to the French Commander-in-Chief on 26th May, Joffre reacted violently, as Haig recorded in his diary:

I said that, before fixing the date, I would like to indicate the state of preparedness of the British Army on certain dates and compare its condition. I took 1st and 15th July and 1st and 15th August. The moment I mentioned August 15th. Joffre at once got very excited and shouted that 'The French

Army would cease to exist if we did nothing till then'. The rest of us looked on at this outburst of excitement, and then I pointed out that, in spite of 15th August being the most favourable date for the British Army to take action, yet, in view of what he had said regarding the unfortunate condition of the French Army, I was prepared to commence operations on the 1st July or thereabouts. This calmed the old man.³⁵

Elsewhere, other Allied plans were coming to fruition. On 4th June, the Russians struck with great initial success on a 200 mile front against the Austrians, and the Italians, after regaining the initiative against an Austrian attack which had threatened the Venetian plain, counter-attacked fiercely in mid-June, also with success. As the Germans were wearing themselves out at Verdun and the British and French were preparing to attack, with great superiority in numbers, on the Somme, it was beginning to look as though the plans laid at a Chantilly conference in December 1915, would be crowned with success. 'Never before, and never again till the fall of 1918' writes Guinn, 'were the prospects of a military victory over the German Army so attractive'.³⁶

The 38th Division moves South

Meanwhile, there was a heightening of activity all along the British front line. In April, May and early June, the 38th Division carried out at least 6 raids on German trenches, some successful, some not; depending in the main on how effectively the wire had been cut beforehand. In most places, the opposing lines were too close together for the wire to be cut by shell fire and the favourite device was a 'Bangalore Torpedo', - a long tube filled with explosive, which, when it worked (and frequently it did not), blew a wide path through the wire capable of admitting men three abreast. On 10th May, the 10th Welsh placed a torpedo successfully in position under the German wire, but, instead of exploding, it fizzled away in full view of the German line and, as the Bangalore Torpedo was supposed to be secret, an officer and a lance-corporal had to risk their lives trying to retrieve it. As all element of surprise was lost, the raid was called off.³⁷

Even when the wire was successfully cut and the German trenches entered, there still remained a hazardous return to the British line amidst heavy retaliatory fire from rifles and machine guns,

and it was at this stage that most casualties were suffered. A typical example was on the night of 7th/8th May when 4 officers and 51 NCO's and men of the 15th RWF (London Welsh) raided German trenches north of Farquissart, where the division had moved in the middle of April. On this raid, the wire was cut quietly by hand by an advance party and the raiders, divided into two parties to increase the chances of success, reached the German parapet unobserved:

Right and Left Parties filed into action. Both were surprised at the number of enemy in adjacent Bays and along the traffic way. The Germans stood sandwiched together, some without equipment and arms, which seems to show that they did not constitute the ordinary Garrison of the trench. Although they could offer no opposition, they blocked the way of the Bombers. Realising that there was a delay in front, some Bombers on the Parapet, started to Bomb successive Bays to right and to left from the ditch, outside the Parapet. In this way they helped to clear up the Bays in front of the Bombers who were in the trenches bombing around the Traverses. Right Party also encountered a narrow Communication Trench also congested with Germans. The enemy in this trench was vigorously bombed and his casualties were severe..... Left Party also found progress slow on account of the density of the enemy. At one point a general rush was made by the occupants of a Bay to a Bomb store but before they could secure any Bombs.... they were put out of action by our leading Bombers. Numerous attempts to gain this Store by the enemy were prevented by steady bombing. Enemy casualties were heavy here.³⁸

After 13 minutes of intense activity during which more than 200 bombs were thrown and 50 yards of German trench occupied, the raid commander, Captain Owen, decided to withdraw. Until then, neither raiding party had suffered a single casualty but as they retired, machine-guns and rifles opened fire on them and 2 young officers and one man were lost; 2 men were killed and 9 wounded. Nevertheless, it was estimated that at least 50 Germans had been killed or wounded and the raid was judged a success. When the news reached General Haking he was full of praise for the 'fine fighting spirit' of the 15th RWF and he rated the raid as the third most successful on his front since early December. On his recommendation the battalion was mentioned in Sir Douglas Haig's despatches.³⁹

A few days later, General Haking made plans for several raids to be carried out simultaneously in early June. Divisional Commanders were asked to make proposals for a 'somewhat larger raid than usual' though each was unaware that other divisions were also involved.

By this means, Haking hoped to keep from the Germans any inkling that something special was afoot. At the last moment, however, Haking was told by First Army that 'the Commander-in-Chief has decided that, in view of the proximity of offensive operations on our part and the consequent undesirability in these circumstances of disturbing the front and expending a quantity of ammunition which might otherwise be better employed, the simultaneous raids which were to have been carried out on the night of the 3rd/4th June are not to take place.'⁴⁰ The Corps Commander was however allowed to make such raids as he 'considered desirable from time to time', and acting on this, the 38th Division launched three raids against the German line in quick succession. Two, by the 14th RWF and 14th Welsh Battalions were successful in reaching and entering the German trenches, but the third, by the 10th Welsh, was held up on the wire, three men being killed and all four officers and nine men wounded. A few nights earlier, however, the 10th Welsh, with a great burst of activity had in one night dug themselves half way across no-man's-land. This trench - known thereafter as Rhondda sap - was to be used a month later as a launching point for an attack on the German line, during the ill-fated battle of Fromelles.⁴¹

This flurry of raids by the 38th (Welsh) Division marked the division's farewell to XI Corps. On 11th and 12th June the two infantry brigades in the line, and the Divisional artillery, were relieved by units of the newly arrived 61st Division and the 38th marched south to prepare for the Battle of the Somme. After 7 months in the trenches, the trek south through the hills of Artois brought a great sense of freedom and momentarily of relief from the cares of war:

The marching in good air was leaving its mark on us all, and we were gaining a release from the humiliating burden of mud that had clogged our pores and turned our thoughts into our own greyness. We walked with a swing, we sang on the march; men began to laugh to argue and even quarrel, a sure sign of recovery from the torpor of winter. We were going into battle, true enough, from which few of us could hope to return, but at the moment we were many miles from war, and the hedges were rich with dog-rose and honeysuckle; we were seeing the old flowers in a new country.⁴²

On 15th June the Division joined the XVII Corps (Third Army) at St. Pol and moved into a new training area just East of the village,

where they began to train seriously for offensive action. The training programme which GHQ had issued a few weeks earlier laid down that divisions were to train not only to attack on a large scale against enemy trenches and strong points but also to follow through once the enemy defences had been broken:

Divisions must, therefore, be practiced in the passing of a fresh body of attacking troops through the troops which have carried out the first assault and have reached their objective. The second attack will be carried out on the same principles, the assaulting columns going straight through to the objective in successive lines.⁴³

Considerable emphasis was also placed on the importance of learning to deal with the unexpected, for Haig was well aware that during their period in the trenches junior officers had become accustomed to acting only on detailed orders.

On 16th June, the division dug a system of trenches on which to practice its manoeuvres. Here they were at a disadvantage, for, being in GHQ Reserve and not yet destined for any particular part of the front, they were unable to reproduce the features of the ground over which they would eventually fight. This was to prove of great significance later, for when the division eventually went into battle they were faced with a large, heavily defended wood and woodland fighting had not been included in their training programme.⁴⁴

For the first 6 days of training, platoons and companies practised going into the attack over open ground in extended lines, or waves, each successive wave carrying the action forward as the one in front supposed itself in check. This was followed by 3 days of brigade and divisional manoeuvres in which, for the first time in France, all arms joined - artillery brigades, machine-gun companies, signallers, engineers etc. - aided by spotter aircraft from the Royal Flying Corps.

The exercises were carefully planned. Each unit was given a definite objective and detailed orders were issued by Divisional and Brigade Headquarters. Annex C shows the orders issued by the 113th Infantry Brigade (Brig.-Gen. Price-Davies) for a mock attack on trenches representing the German 2nd and 3rd Lines on 24th June. For this attack,

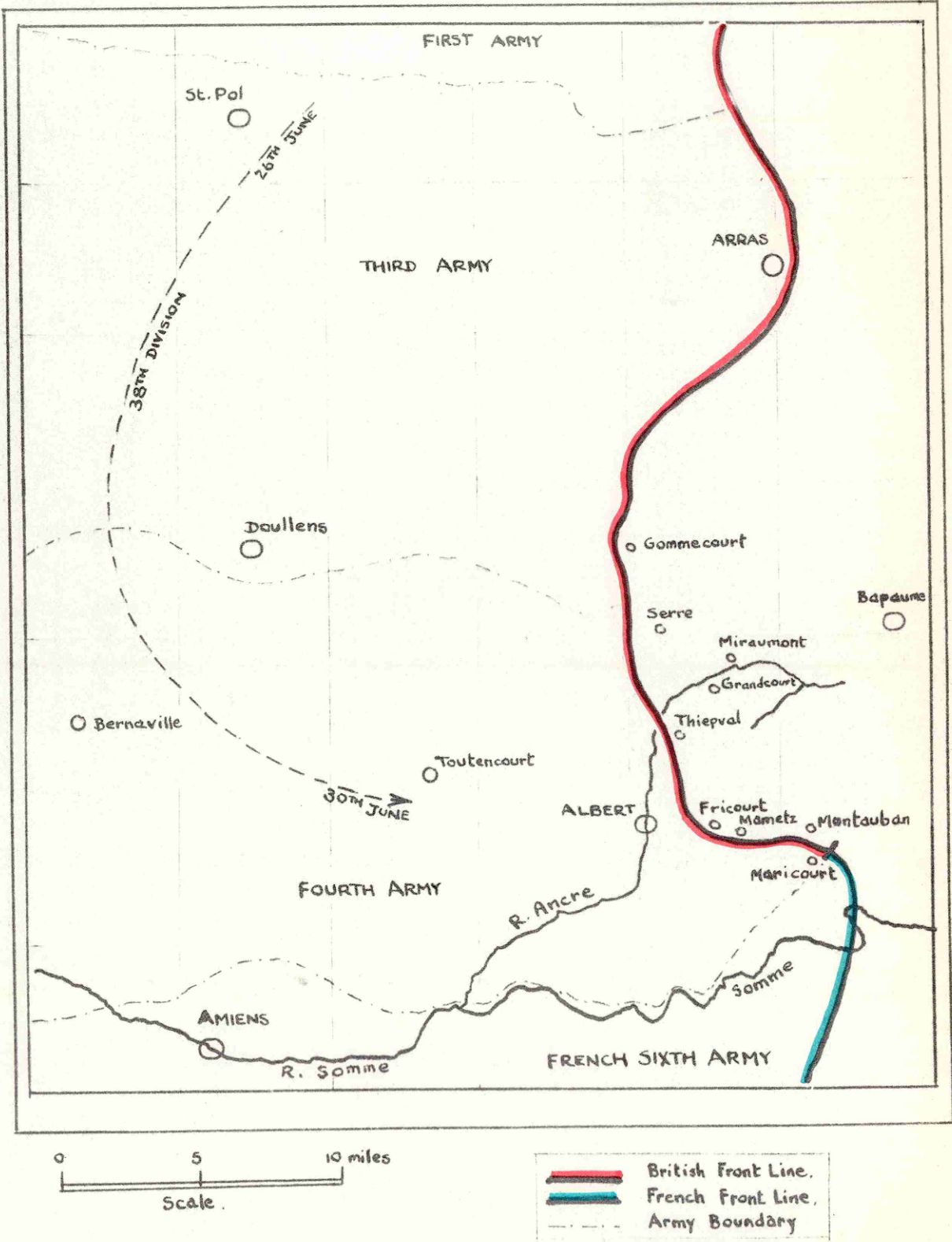
which was supported by a full artillery brigade, the 113th used all its available forces - two battalions in the initial assault and two for the capture of the final objective. Though the absence of an enemy must have lent an air of unreality to the proceedings, the Brigade Staff were nevertheless given an opportunity to handle large forces in the open and to practice the difficult manoeuvre of passing one battalion through another. As the attack proceeded, unit commanders were deliberately confronted with unexpected difficulties. Some, for example, were told that they had advanced into their own artillery fire; others that formations to right or left had been held up by the enemy and were in need of assistance. Until appropriate action was taken, the unit concerned was deemed to have suffered casualties on a scale determined by watching umpires.⁴⁵

Some valuable lessons were learned during this all-too-short period of training - particularly about the importance of maintaining good communications between infantry and artillery. But the technique of advancing in extended lines, proposed by GHQ and practised diligently at St Pol. was to prove less than effective on the field of battle.

On 26th June, the men still exhausted from their strenuous activities on the training ground, the Division marched west of Doullens, where they came under the command of GOC II Corps, in GHQ Reserve, and then south-eastwards to Toutencourt which they reached on 30th June - the eve of the Battle of the Somme. Here they waited for orders, prepared to move at 6 hours notice.⁴⁶

The Battle of the Somme

As we have seen, neither the ground nor the date for the coming battle were of Haig's choosing. He would have much preferred an operation in Flanders which at least offered the possibility of turning the German flank to the sea. There were however two drawbacks to such a plan; firstly, the King of the Belgians was opposed to offensive action on his soil⁴⁷ and secondly, an attack in this area would, perforce, be on a much narrower front than any combined offensive with the French. The Somme in fact seems to have been chosen by Joffre for this very reason, for it had few other strategic advantages. It is true that Joffre, in



MAP 3. THE SOMME. ROUTE TAKEN BY 38TH (WELSH) DIVISION.

advocating this particular part of the front, had drawn attention to the fact that it had been quiet for some time - thus implying that the Germans might not be on the alert⁴⁸ - but that was in December, since when the Germans had been busy all along the front preparing their defences. By 1st July the defences north of the Somme presented a very formidable obstacle. Throughout the planning of the Somme battle, Haig kept up his sleeve an alternative plan for an attack at Messines in Belgium should the French effort on the Somme dwindle as a result of the heavy fighting at Verdun, but it was never used.

North of the River Somme, the British line ran, as Map 3 shows, westward from Maricourt to Fricourt and then northward to Thiepval and Serre, cutting through fertile chalk downs reminiscent of the hills of southern England, though more open and unfenced. Around Fricourt and Mametz the hills are steeper and more wooded than to the north where the ground rises and dips with 'graceful gentleness'. Along this front, General Sir Henry Rawlinson, whose Fourth Army was to make the main assault for the British, had by 1st July assembled five Corps: eleven Divisions in the line and five in close support. In addition there were two divisions and one cavalry division in Army reserve. On the left, the British Third Army was to cooperate with a simultaneous attack by two divisions on Gommecourt. On the British right, the French Sixth Army sat astride the marshy valley of the River Somme with three Corps: the XX Corps north of the river; the I Colonial Corps immediately south of the river and the XXXV Corps on the far right. In all, five divisions would go into the attack along a front of 8 to 9 miles compared to eleven divisions along 15 miles on Rawlinson's front. The burden of the attack would therefore fall on the British.

Haig's plan was to break through the German line between Maricourt and Fricourt and drive northward, rolling up the Germans behind the Fricourt-Thiepval front and creating an ever-widening gap in the German defences as British troops attacking on that front joined in.⁴⁹ Although Rawlinson was to command all Fourth Army forces during the opening assault, Lt.-Gen. Gough was standing by with a mobile force, drawn from Fourth Army and GHQ Reserves, to spearhead the advance once the defences had been breached.

Experience at Neuve Chapelle and Vimy Ridge in 1915 had taught the Germans that a single line of defence, even when reinforced by a network of subsidiary trenches, was inadequate to withstand the increasing strength of British and French artillery. In the summer of that year they had begun to construct, along the whole length of their front, a second defensive position, as strongly fortified as the first, about two miles behind the front line. Early in 1916, faced with the possibility of a Franco-British offensive on the Western Front they started to build a third line, two miles further to the rear again which was completed in May 1916. The front trench itself was considerably strengthened and the garrison protected from artillery fire by the insertion of thick traverses at frequent intervals to contain the blast from exploding shells. Deep dug-outs were also built, 20 or 30 feet down into the chalk. In front, the barbed wire had been massed into two great belts, each 30 yards deep and 15 yards apart, interlaced with iron stakes and tall trestles to form an impenetrable barrier 3 to 5 feet high. In the hilly country of the Somme, the whole system of defence, traversed by interconnecting trenches and provided with an excellent, deep-laid telephone network, rose 'tier upon tier' on the hillsides, to a distance of 4 to 6 miles behind the front line.⁵⁰

Because of the strength of the German defence, and the limited range of his own field artillery, Rawlinson in his early planning decided not to attempt to carry the second line at the first assault but to limit himself to an advance of about 2,000 yards on a line from Mametz in the south to Serre in the north while maintaining strong defensive positions on either flank. He would then reform, and push forward another thousand yards to capture the German second line between Pozieres and Grandcourt where it came nearest to the front line. During this stage he would again stay on the defensive on both flanks.⁵¹

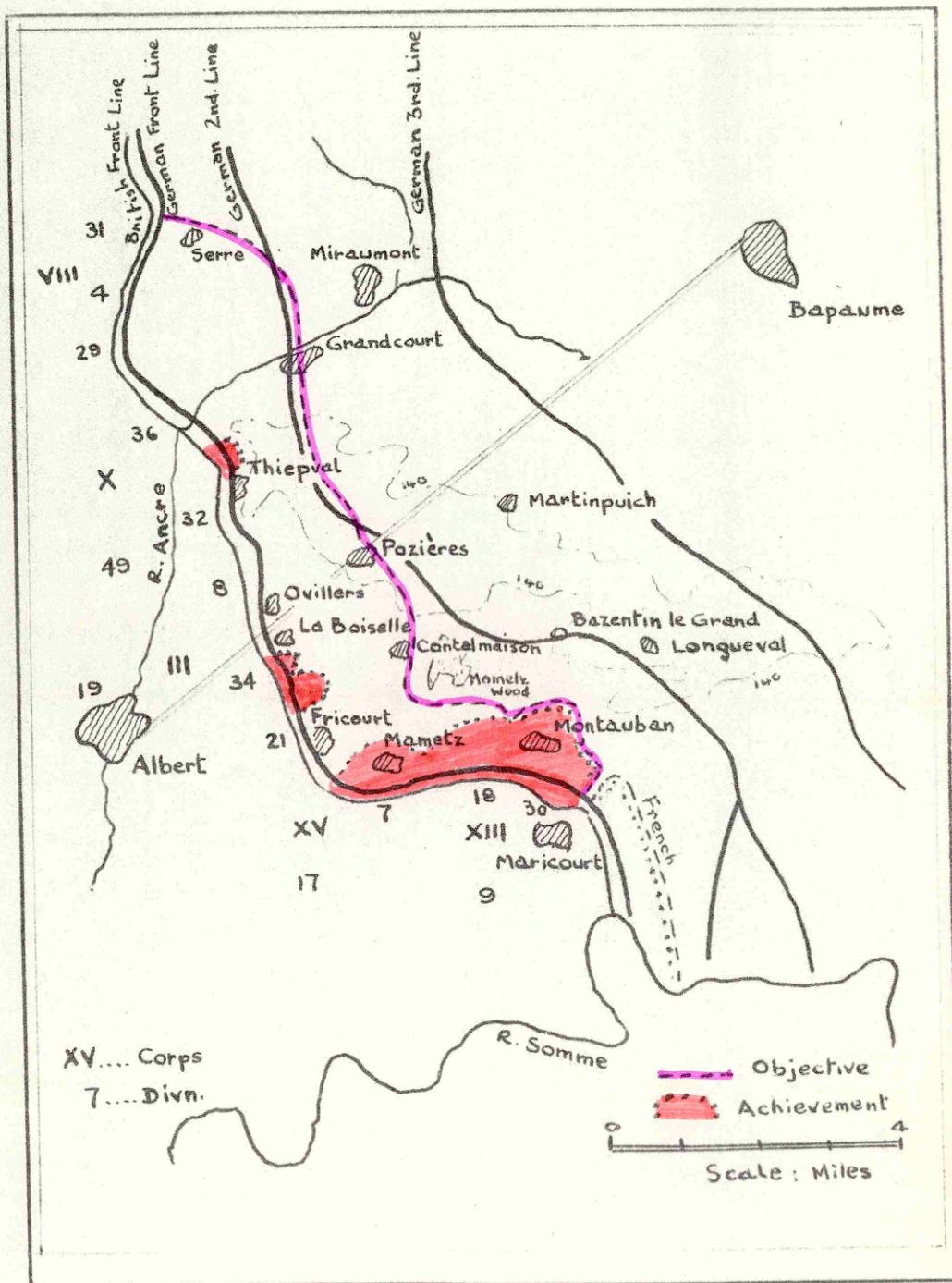
This was not good enough for Haig. He was convinced that the Germans would fall back in confusion and wished to take advantage of their disarray to capture not only their front line but also much of their second position, and their heavy artillery, during the first day. He also wanted a big push on both flanks, to capture the high ground around Montauban on the right, and west of Miraumont on the left, which he regarded as particularly important for the development of subsequent stages of the battle.⁵²

In spite of Rawlinson's worries about the distance to be covered by the infantry and about the difficulties of cutting the wire in front of the second line, this is substantially the plan finally adopted (see map 4). The details of the opening attack were thrashed out at Fourth Army headquarters on 12th June, as was the broad outline of subsequent phases of the battle. Four days later Haig put in writing his own view of the way the battle should develop after the first day. The attack, he wrote, should be

pressed eastward far enough to enable our cavalry to push through into the open country beyond the enemy's prepared lines of defence. Our object will then be to turn northwards taking the enemy's lines in flank and reverse.⁵³

But it was not to be. At 7.30 am on 1st July, after 7 days of heavy bombardment which was confidently expected to obliterate the German wire and all defenders in the German trenches, the British infantry rose from its trenches as the guns lifted from the German front line, and, in brilliant sunshine, stumbled under a heavy load across the broken ground of no-man's-land into a hail of machine-gun fire. Thousands were mown down near their own trenches; others were held up on the German wire which in many places the guns had failed to breach. Only in the south was there any lasting success, the 18th and 30th Divisions of the XIII Corps (both New Army divisions) capturing their objectives around Montauban; and the 7th and 21st Divisions of the XV Corps partially doing so by capturing Mametz village and breaking the German front line west of Fricourt (see map 4). Elsewhere it was total failure, although the 36th (Ulster) Division of the X Corps broke right through to the German 2nd position near Thiepval only to be beaten back, with very heavy casualties, to the German front line. The losses on the whole front for that one day were disastrous - nearly 60,000 in all, including more than 20,000 killed or missing - though the figures reaching Rawlinson at Fourth Army headquarters (16,000 by 7.30 pm) failed to reveal the true position.⁵⁴

On the right, the French, with a greater concentration of heavy artillery, did better, the XX Corps quickly overrunning the German front line north of the Somme. South of the river, the French



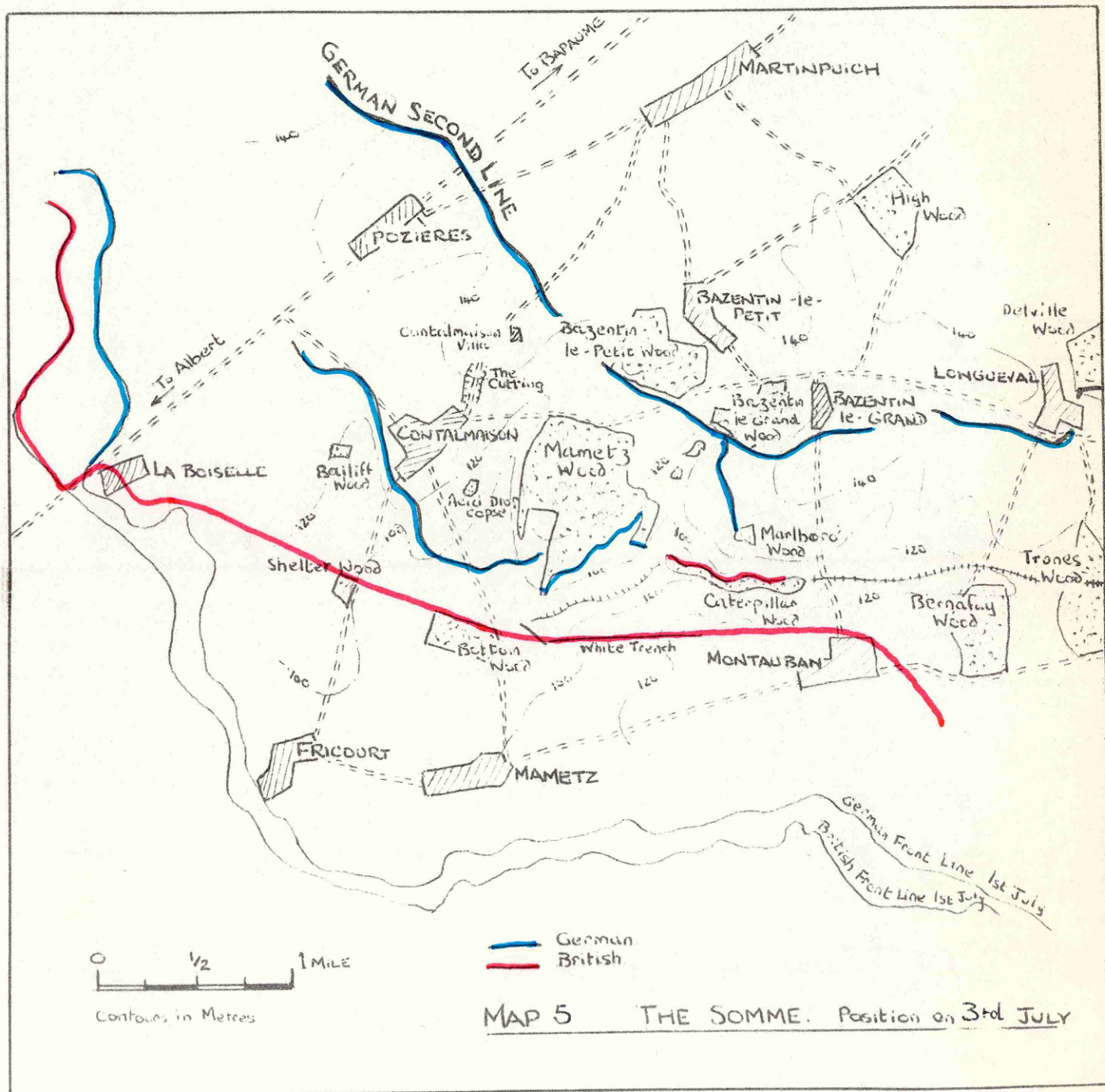
MAP 4 OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS: 1ST JULY 1916

pushed well beyond their first objectives almost to the German second line.⁵⁵

During the afternoon, Haig visited Fourth headquarters and 'expressed the wish that the attack of the Fourth Army should be continued on the 2nd'. The situation, he felt, 'was as yet too obscure for any radical change of plan; the best that could be done for the moment was to keep up the pressure on the enemy, wear out his defence, and, with a view to an attack on his second position, gain possession of all those parts of his front position and of the intermediate lines still in his hands'. The village of Fricourt, already enveloped, was to be a prime target.⁵⁶ After leaving Fourth Army headquarters, Haig motored to II Corps where he released two divisions - the 38th (Welsh) and the 23rd - from GHQ Reserve to Fourth Army, so that Rawlinson could put his existing reserves into the line for 2nd July.⁵⁷

At 7 pm, Rawlinson, realising that there was now no hope of an early breakthrough, telephoned Haig to say that he was putting the VIII Corps and X Corps under Gough at 7 am the following morning⁵⁸ so that he, Rawlinson, could concentrate his attention on the three Corps south of the River Ancre. Gough's independent command eventually became the Fifth Army.

At 10 pm Rawlinson issued orders for the attack to be continued next day on the left and in the centre of the new Fourth Army frontage south of the Ancre - with the object of capturing La Boisselle, Ovillers, Fricourt and Contalmaison. At Fricourt the Germans offered little resistance at first and by mid-day on 2nd July the 17th (Northern) Division had occupied the village and pushed on towards Bottom Wood about a mile beyond. On their right, the 7th Division advanced from Mametz Village to White Trench, just south of Mametz Wood (see Map 5). At La Boisselle however the 19th (Western) Division had difficulty in moving forward over shell-torn and congested ground and was not ready to attack until 4 pm, and then with only one Brigade. Nevertheless by 9 pm half the village had been captured. At Ovillers, the 12th (Eastern) Division, having just moved into the line from Reserve, had even greater organisational difficulties, and the order to capture the village was cancelled. At the end of the day Contalmaison remained well out of reach. Throughout this time, Gough's two Corps on the



left, and the successful XIII Corps on the right, stood on the defensive, the former because Gough considered them to be in no fit state to attack until the morning of the 3rd, the latter because Rawlinson was not prepared to advance further on this front until he had made 'a strong line from Boisselle to Montauban as a basis from which to carry out further attacks'.⁵⁹ He was confirmed in this view by aircraft reports that the ridge opposite Montauban was strongly held. Haig however had heard that the enemy had 'only a few patrols in Bernafay Wood (N.E. of Montauban) and that they were surrendering freely'. He therefore told his Chief of Staff, Lt.-Gen. Kiggell, to 'urge Rawlinson to greater activity in the direction of Longueval'. He also sent his Commander, Royal Artillery, (Maj.-Gen. Birch) to Fourth Army Headquarters 'to go into the artillery situation with the same objective'.⁶⁰ In Haig's view there was plenty of men, but insufficient ammunition to sustain an attack along the whole Fourth Army front, and he was keen to concentrate on the ridge between Longueval and Bazentin-le-Grand which would enable him to 'overlook the slopes running thence northwards and to threaten envelopment of [enemy] troops on the Pozieres-Thiepval position'.⁶¹ He believed this would be more successful than a direct attack from the direction of La Boisselle and Thiepval on the Pozieres ridge where the defences as he told Joffre the following day, were 'very much stronger and deeper'.⁶² He failed however to secure a promise from the French to do anything other than give very limited support to his right wing. This made it difficult for Haig to exploit the success gained at Montauban on 1st July.

Before dawn on 3rd July, the 12th (Eastern) Division attacked and entered the German line in front of Ovillers. When the attack moved on to the support trenches however, the Germans counter-attacked fiercely and the attackers were gradually overwhelmed. A few entered the outskirts of Ovillers but were soon driven back. In this bitter fighting, the 12th Division lost nearly 2,400 officers and men. To the right, the 19th Division increased its grip on La Boisselle and the three divisions of the XV Corps - the 7th, 17th and 21st - strengthened their positions below Mametz Wood, the 17th Division capturing Bottom Wood and the 21st Division, Shelter Wood. On the night of 3rd/4th July, the 21st Division was taken out of the line to rest and the 38th (Welsh)

Division came into XV Corps Reserve.

The 38th Division had marched through the night of 1st/2nd July from Toutencourt to Acheux, about 5 miles behind the front line at Thiepval. After a day's rest they turned South to Treux, 4 miles south-west of Albert, where they joined XV Corps and billeted in the nearby villages for the night of 4th/5th July. On the way, they passed tented encampments of cavalry which had been concentrated just west of Albert. A few days earlier the cavalry divisions had been given priority on the roads leading to the front, but now they were kicking their heels waiting for a break through which never came. On the 5th, the Welsh Division, less artillery, was ordered to take over the front from Bottom Wood to Caterpillar Wood from the 7th Division whose artillery would remain in position. Units of the division moved into the area below Mametz Wood that evening, 'footsore and weary',⁶³ to begin the relief, which was completed by 1 am on 6th July. Maj.-Gen. Ivor Philipps sent the following message of encouragement to every man in the division:

You have worked hard for many months with an energy and zeal beyond praise to fit yourselves for the task you have voluntarily undertaken. You have undergone the hardships of a winter campaign with fortitude. You have earned the praise of your Corps Commanders for your courage, discipline and devotion to duty. You have now held for 6 months a section of the British line in France, during which time you have not allowed one of the enemy to enter your trenches except as a prisoner, and on several occasions you have entered the enemy's lines. 11 Officers and 44 NCO's and men have already received rewards from the King for gallant and distinguished conduct in the field. Your fellow countrymen at home are following your career with interest and admiration. I always believed that a really Welsh Division would be second to none. You have more than justified that belief. I feel that whatever the future may have in store for us I can rely upon you, because you have already given ample proof of your worth. During the short period in the Training Area you worked hard to qualify yourselves for still further efforts. I thank you most sincerely for the loyal and wholehearted way in which you have all supported me and for the way in which each one of you has done his utmost to carry out the task allotted to him. With such a spirit animating all ranks we can one and all look forward with confidence to the future, whatever it may have in store for us. You are today relieving the 7th Division, which has attacked and captured German trenches on a front of a little less than one mile and for a depth of about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles. In this attack the village of Mametz was captured, the enemy have suffered very heavy casualties, 1,500 German Officers and men were taken prisoners and 6 field guns were captured.

The 1st Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the 1st Battalion, Welsh Regiment of the 7th Division have both distinguished themselves in this attack, and I am confident that the young battalions of the famous Welsh Regiments serving in the 38th (Welsh) Division will maintain the high standard for valour for which all 3 Welsh Regiments have been renowned throughout the war.⁶⁴

Siegfried Sassoon, with all the superiority of one who had arrived in France 4 weeks earlier than the 38th Division, watched some of the incoming units arrive at Bottom Wood:

In the evening we were relieved. The incoming battalion numbered more than double our own strength (we were less than 400) and they were unseasoned New Army troops. Our little trench under the trees was inundated by a jostling company of exclamatory Welshmen. Kinjack would have called them a panicky rabble. They were mostly undersized men, and as I watched them arriving at the first stage of their battle experience I had a sense of their victimisation. A little platoon officer was settling his men down with a valiant show of self-assurance. For the sake of appearances, orders of some kind had to be given, though in reality there was nothing to do except sit down and hope it wouldn't rain. He spoke sharply to some of them, and I felt that they were like a lot of children. It was going to be a bad look-out for two such bewildered companies, huddled up in the Quadrangle, which had been over-garrisoned by our own comparatively small contingent. Visualizing that forlorn crowd of khaki figures under the twilight of the trees, I can believe that I saw then, for the first time, how blindly war destroys its victims. The sun had gone down on my own reckless brandishings, and I understood the doomed condition of these half trained civilians who had been sent up to attack the Wood.⁶⁵

Sassoon might, perhaps, have been less patronising had he been able to read the minds of the incoming troops. They were equally condescending in their views, and not at all overawed at taking over from the 1st Battalion of their own Regiment (to which Sassoon belonged):

Our guides [from the 1st Battalion] lost their way, but having wandered over most of the country we found ourselves in a half dug trench and we were told 'this was the spot'. By now I can forgive the company of the 1st Battalion for the unseemly haste with which it departed. But at the time, coming from an area where reliefs had amounted almost to a ceremonial parade, I was little less than amazed when I found no officers, no instructions, no information or anything else, and found that the tired regulars had departed almost as quickly as the Portugese used to up north.⁶⁶

After this unpropitious beginning, the Welshmen posted out sentries and spent the night slinging dead over the parapet and deepening the trench. When daylight came, they fired sporadically at the Germans in Mametz Wood while waiting, in unpleasant surroundings, for further orders.

NOTES ON CHAPTER TWO

Epigraph: David Jones, In Parenthesis, 1937 p 54

1. Llewelyn Wyn Griffith, Up to Mametz. London 1931, p.12
2. Jones, In Parenthesis. p.7
3. WO 95/2539, 38th (Welsh) Division War Diary. First entry (6 December 1915) and Appendix II.
4. Robert Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919 London 1952, p.115.
5. Lord Hankey, The Supreme Command Vol.2 London 1961, p.444
6. Philip Magnus, Kitchener. London 1958. p 426 and pp. 437-8.
7. Paul Guinn, British Strategy and Politics 1914 to 1918 Oxford, 1965, p 113. However, Robertson himself, in Private to Field Marshal (London 1921), gives no hint of any connivance.
8. Hankey, Supreme Command Vol.2, p.466
9. Cyril Falls, The First World War London 1960, p 84. The official history puts the figure at 38, but notes that 'the 46th Division, part of which was on passage to Egypt, is counted as in France.' (1916 Vol.1, p.18).
10. Victor Bonham-Carter, Soldier True: The Life and Times of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson. London 1963, pp 154-155.
11. Hankey, Supreme Command Vol.2, p 469.
12. Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig. p 124. Also Bonham-Carter: Soldier True. p.154
13. Hankey, Supreme Command. p 469
14. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol.1, p.21. The division started to embark on 1st January 1916 but because of a shortage of ships the move was eventually cancelled.
15. Jones, In Parenthesis, p.13.
16. WO 95/2539, 38th Division War Diary; also Brigade and Battalion diaries. Appendix VII to the 38th Division diary for December gives the training programme in full but battalion records show that it was not always possible to implement it.
17. For the programme of attachments see Annex B, based on records in the 38th Division War Diary.
18. Griffith, Up to Mametz: p.21

19. Jones, In Parenthesis. pp 43-49.
20. Griffith, Up to Mametz. pp 56-57
21. Edmonds, Official History. 1916 Vol.1, pp 157-158
22. WO 95/881 XI Corps War Diary, entry for 12th Jan. 1916.
23. WO 95/2539 Appendix V to 38th Division War Diary for January 1916: Memorandum by Lt.-Gen. R Haking, 'to be read out to all troops in the 38th Division'.
24. The Battle of Fromelles, July 1916, intended as a diversion for the Battle of the Somme. Two divisions, one British, one Australian, lost heavily in an ill-conceived attack on the German line opposite the First Army/Second Army boundary. In 1930 Major-General Elliott, who had been a Brigade Commander in the Australian Division, launched a bitter attack on Haking who had been responsible for the plans: 'one General of strong personality and little ability seems to have been allowed to run the Battle without control which produced such disastrous results.' (WO 95/881).
25. Jones, In Parenthesis. p.71
26. WO 95/2539 Tactical Progress Report No.7. Quoted verbatim except that names of the nearest geographical features have been substituted for map references and some repetitive phrases have been deleted. The associated map is based on a section of the Ordnance Survey map for the Richbourg sector (Imperial War Museum: Edition 9A)
27. WO 95/2559 14th Welsh Battalion War Diary.
28. Griffith, Up to Mametz. p.77
29. Not just in 38th Division. See, for example, Blunden, Undertones of War p.38.
30. WO 95/2557 114th Inf. Bde. War Diary. Appendix to May 1916 volume: 38th Division instruction GS13/6/1, dated 22/5/16, asked Brigades in reserve to train two companies at a time in carrying out attacks.
31. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol. 1 pp 25-27.
32. *ibid.* p.28
33. Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig. p.129
34. Bonham-Carter, Soldier True p.170; also Blake, p.138
35. Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig. pp.144 and 145. Quoted also by Guinn, p.139.
36. Guinn, British Strategy and Politics 1914 to 1918. p. 139

37. T.O. Marden, History of the Welch Regiment 1914-1918
Cardiff 1932 p.379. Also WO95/2557 and WO95/2559.
38. WO95/2539 38th Division War Diary. Annex to May 1916:
Report by Lt. Col. R C Bell, O.C. 15th RWF.
39. ibid and WO 95/2551. Lt.-Gen. Haking's praise of the battalion is
contained in a manuscript addition (dated 10 May 1916) to
the document mentioned in Note 38. His rating of 22 raids
on the XI Corps front is given in a report to 1st Army
dated May 1916. (Copy in WO95/2551).
40. WO 95/881 XI Corps diary copy of First Army GS 360/24(a).
41. See Note 24. Part of the 184th Inf. Bde. attacked from Rhondda
Sap.
42. Griffith, Up to Mametz p.170
43. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Appendices Vol.1
p.125: 'Training of Divisions for Offensive action'.
44. Richard Lyons, (Former Sergeant, Swansea Battalion.) Notes
written for the author, August 1972.
45. WO 95/2539 38th Division War Diary: also WO 95/2562, 11th SWB
War Diary.
46. WO 95/2539 38th Division War Diary
47. Guinn, British strategy and Politics 1914 to 1918. p.135
48. ibid. In a Footnote to p.136, Guinn quotes Liddell Hart as saying
that in the autumn of 1915 the defences on this front, where
he was then serving, were very weak.
49. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol. 1 p.35. The phrase 'graceful
gentleness' is from John Masefield, The Old Front Line,
London 1917, p33.
50. Army Quarterly Vol.7, No.2, 1924 pp 245-255: "Other side of the
Hill" - an account of German defences during the battle of
the Somme based on German Regimental Histories. The
quotation 'tier upon tier' is from Cruttwell, A History
of the Great War. Oxford 1936 p.259
51. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol.1 p.250
52. ibid. pp.253-254. Another Corps - the XVth - was added to
Fourth Army when Haig's more ambitious plan was adopted.
53. ibid. p.266
54. ibid. p.480
55. B H Liddell Hart, History of the First World War. London 1930
(as The Real War). p.242

56. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol.1. p.481
57. Haig MS. Diary entry for 1st July
58. *ibid.*
59. Rawlinson MS. Journal entry for 2nd July
60. Haig MS. Diary entry for 2nd July. Earlier, Haig had himself visited Fourth Army HQ to make the same point.
61. *ibid.* Memorandum from Kiggell to Rawlinson dated 2nd July.
62. *ibid.* 'Note of interview between Sir D Haig and General Joffre on 3rd July at VAL VION:
63. Letter from W B Joshua to author, January 1974.
64. WO 95/2561 17th RWF War Diary copy of General Philipps's Order of the Day dated 5th July 1916.
65. Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer. London 1930 p.69. 'Kinjack' is Sassoon's fictional name for the CO., 1st RWF.
66. CAB 45/189 Notes from J Glynn Jones, Captain, 14th RWF, written after the war.

CHAPTER THREE.

Mametz Wood: 5th-9th July 1916

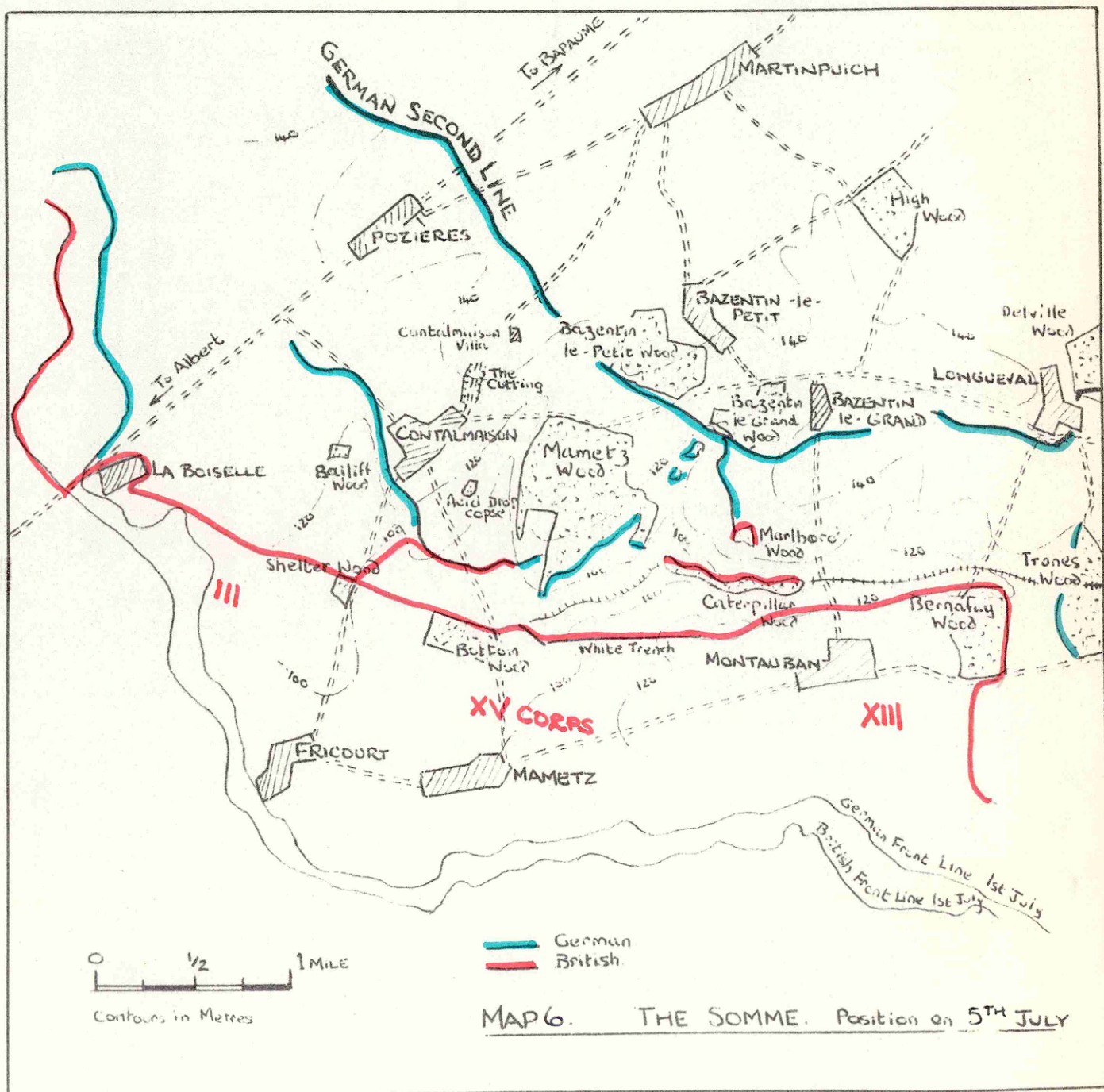
Alas said this staff-captain.
Ah dam said this staff-major.
Alas alas said Colonel Talabollion

On 3rd July the Fourth Army had begun its preparations for the attack on the German second line on Bazentin ridge. On the right, XIII Corps was ordered to occupy Bernafay Wood and Caterpillar Wood as soon as possible and to push patrols forward into Trones Wood (see Map 6). XV Corps in the centre and III Corps on the left were told to prepare for attacks on Mametz Wood and Contalmaison respectively once they had consolidated their positions.¹ Final orders were issued on 5th July for all three Corps to advance on 7th July to within attacking distance of the second line. The objectives of each Corps were:

XIII Corps: Trones Wood as far north as the railway line
XV Corps: Mametz Wood, Acid Drop Copse
III Corps: The Cutting, Contalmaison, Bailiff Wood

XV Corps were told to begin their advance through Mametz Wood at once and to capture as much of the wood as possible by the morning of the 7th.²

Haig attached considerable importance to these preliminaries - more so than Rawlinson. On 4th July, Haig visited Rawlinson at 4th Army HQ to impress upon him the importance of getting Trones Wood to cover the right flank and Mametz Wood and Contalmaison to cover the left flank of the attack against the Longueval front.³ A few days later, when Mametz Wood was proving particularly difficult to capture, Rawlinson wanted to press on with the main attack without it. Haig would not agree and ordered Rawlinson not to attempt to pierce the German line until the wood and Contalmaison were in British hands.⁴ General Kiggell, Haig's Chief of Staff, also wrote to Rawlinson giving him the Commander in Chief's views on the tactical situation:



On the left flank of the Fourth Army main attack MAMETZ WOOD is of great tactical importance. Unless it is in our possession the left flank of the main attack would be very insecure. Moreover, this flank could not extend to the west of a line from MARLBORO' WOOD to BAZENTIN le GRAND and the front would be seriously restricted. Furthermore, with MAMETZ WOOD in our possession BAZENTIN le PETIT WOOD and the enemy trenches to the south of it will be seriously threatened by us, and it may prove possible to assault them. Even the threat on them and on BAZENTIN le PETIT WOOD from the west, will be of great support and encouragement to the left flank of the main attack. For these reasons it is considered that only such a state of demoralisation on the enemy's side as would justify great risks being taken to profit by it immediately would justify the launching of the main attack before MAMETZ WOOD had been captured.⁵

Rawlinson was not wholly convinced. 'I received this morning Kig's appreciation of the situation with which I entirely agree', he wrote in his diary on 9th July. 'he has put in irreproachable language what I said to D H yesterday. The only point I am doubtful about is whether we are wise to wait for the capture of Mametz Wood before launching our attack against Longueval'.⁶

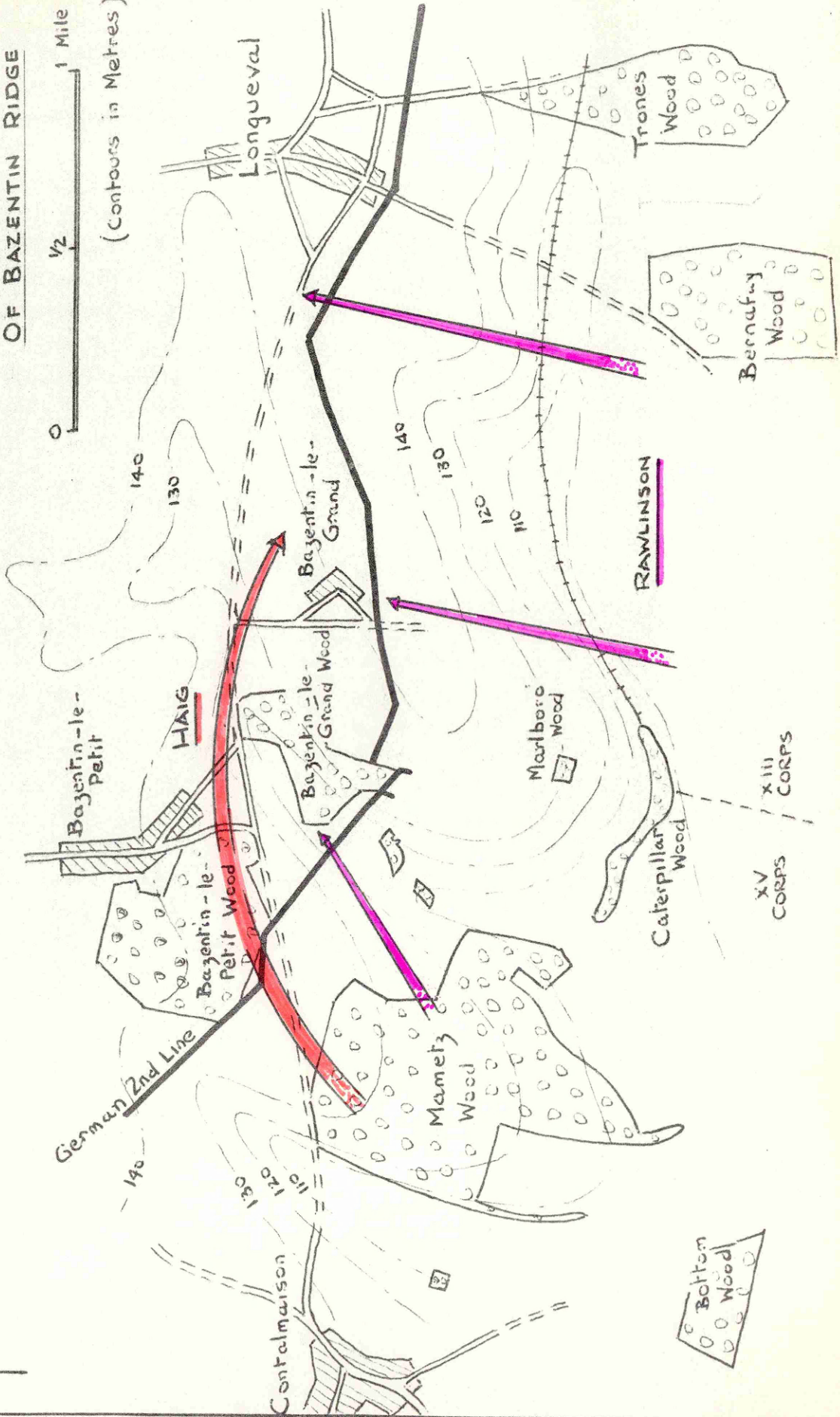
These differing views about the importance of Mametz Wood stemmed directly from a lack of understanding between Haig and Rawlinson over plans for the main assault upon Bazentin ridge. Originally, both had envisaged a frontal attack between the Bazentins and Longueval and both had acknowledged the importance of Mametz Wood on the left flank. As time went by, however, Haig became attracted to the idea of an attack north from Mametz Wood on the line between Contalmaison Villa and Bazentin le Petit Wood and then eastward behind the German line towards Longueval, the German defences being enfiladed by artillery fire from the northern edge of Mametz Wood.⁷ Map 7, shows clearly the uninterrupted view of the German second line from the northern edge of Mametz Wood which would have given the British Artillery considerable advantage over their German counterparts. It also shows how an attack from this point would have been over relatively flat ground to Bazentin le Grand and beyond. Because this plan would have used Mametz Wood as a springboard for attack Haig naturally came to attach more and more importance to its capture as time went by.

Rawlinson on the other hand stuck to the idea of a frontal attack on the line between Bazentin le Grand Wood and Longueval but with

MAP 7. PLANS FOR THE CAPTURE
OF BAZENTIN RIDGE

0 1/2 1 Mile

(Contours in Metres)



this important change: the attack would take place at dawn, the divisions concerned being formed up on the open ground under cover of darkness. This night assembly, of course, considerably reduced the threat from Mametz Wood to the left flank and, although Rawlinson was prepared to support his main attack with a minor thrust from the wood if it was in his hands in time, he was equally prepared to press on without it. To Rawlinson therefore the significance of Mametz Wood diminished as the days wore on. His main concern was to waste as little time as possible in pressing his attack on the German line.

Not until the 10 July - three days after the projected date for the capture of Mametz Wood - did Haig learn of Rawlinson's daring plan. He was not very happy; partly because it involved an uphill attack over 1,000 yards of open ground (see the contours in Map 7) but mainly because he just did not believe it would be possible to form up divisions 'in mass in the dark; which we cannot do in time of peace'.⁸ But Rawlinson continued to argue the merits of his plan, strongly supported by General Montgomery, his Chief of Staff, and by Lieutenant-General Horne, Commander of the XV Corps. On 12th July Haig finally acquiesced, insisting only that strong points should be built to protect the troops assembling on the southern slopes.⁹ While these discussions were taking place, the 17th and 38th Divisions were hurling themselves at Mametz Wood in a desperate attempt to secure its early capture. Ironically, by the time Haig had come round to Rawlinson's way of thinking, the Wood was in British hands. It is a sad commentary on the conduct of the war that both Commanders could issue orders for preliminary attacks, which were to cost thousands of lives, without having an agreed plan for the main battle.

All this was in the future however as the 38th (Welsh) Division moved into the line from Bottom Wood to Caterpillar Wood on 5th July. The aim of the Fourth Army then was quite clear: capture Trones Wood on the right and Mametz Wood on the left-and do it quickly. On 6th July, Rawlinson wrote in his journal:

The attacks by III Corps and XV Corps against CONTALMAISON and MAMETZ WOOD will be carried out as arranged. They have fresh Divisions and I hope all will go well

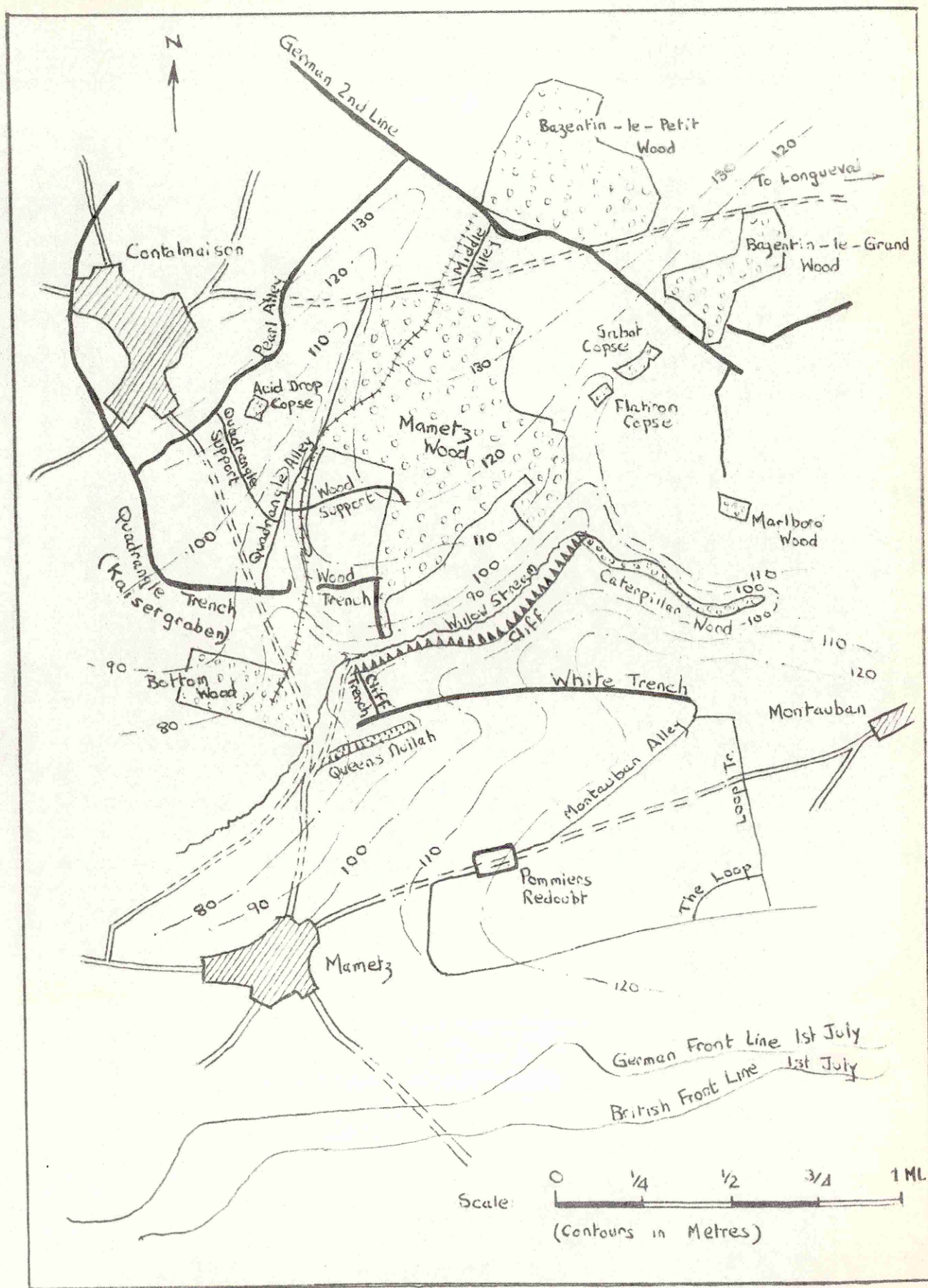
Thus was the 38th (Welsh) Division committed to battle.

Mametz Wood

North of the road from Mametz village to Montauban, the ground falls away, gently at first and then more steeply, until it reaches Willow Stream. The final descent is down a steep chalk bank, or 'cliff', varying from about 30 to 50 feet in height. From Willow Stream the ground rises for more than a mile northward to the ridge which runs from Pozieres, through the Bazentins, to Longueval and on which lay the deeply fortified trenches of the German second line. Mametz Wood, 'a menacing wall of gloom',⁹ lay on a slight spur on the far side of the valley, flanked by two small re-entrant valleys rising up towards the ridge. Because of these undulations troops advancing from the south, east or west would have first to descend the slope of a valley and then climb the far side, exposed all the while to rifle and machine gun fire from the wood and nearby copses.

The wood itself was (and still is) very large and overgrown. From north to south it measured about a mile long, the northern face resting about 300 yards from the German second line (from whence it could quickly be reinforced), the southern extremity dipping down almost to Willow Stream. East to west, it measured about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile at its widest point, although a large open space at the SW corner considerably reduced the width of the southernmost portion. The total area of woodland was about 220 acres.¹⁰

On the night of 3/4th July a small patrol from the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment (7th Division) had entered the wood and reconnoitred the southern areas. They reported the wood dense with undergrowth which made it difficult for infantry to move. They found Strip Trench (see Map 9) strongly wired and well traversed.¹¹ The wood itself was a mixture of oak about 9ft in girth and birch 2 feet in girth, with some beech and ash. The average height was between 30 and 45 feet.¹² The wood, which had been untended for at least two years, was traversed by a central ride running from north to south and two cross rides more or less at right angles, clearly marked on the operational maps used by the XV Corps but in fact suffering from neglect and less easily discernable on the ground.



MAP 8. MAMETZ WOOD & DEFENCES.

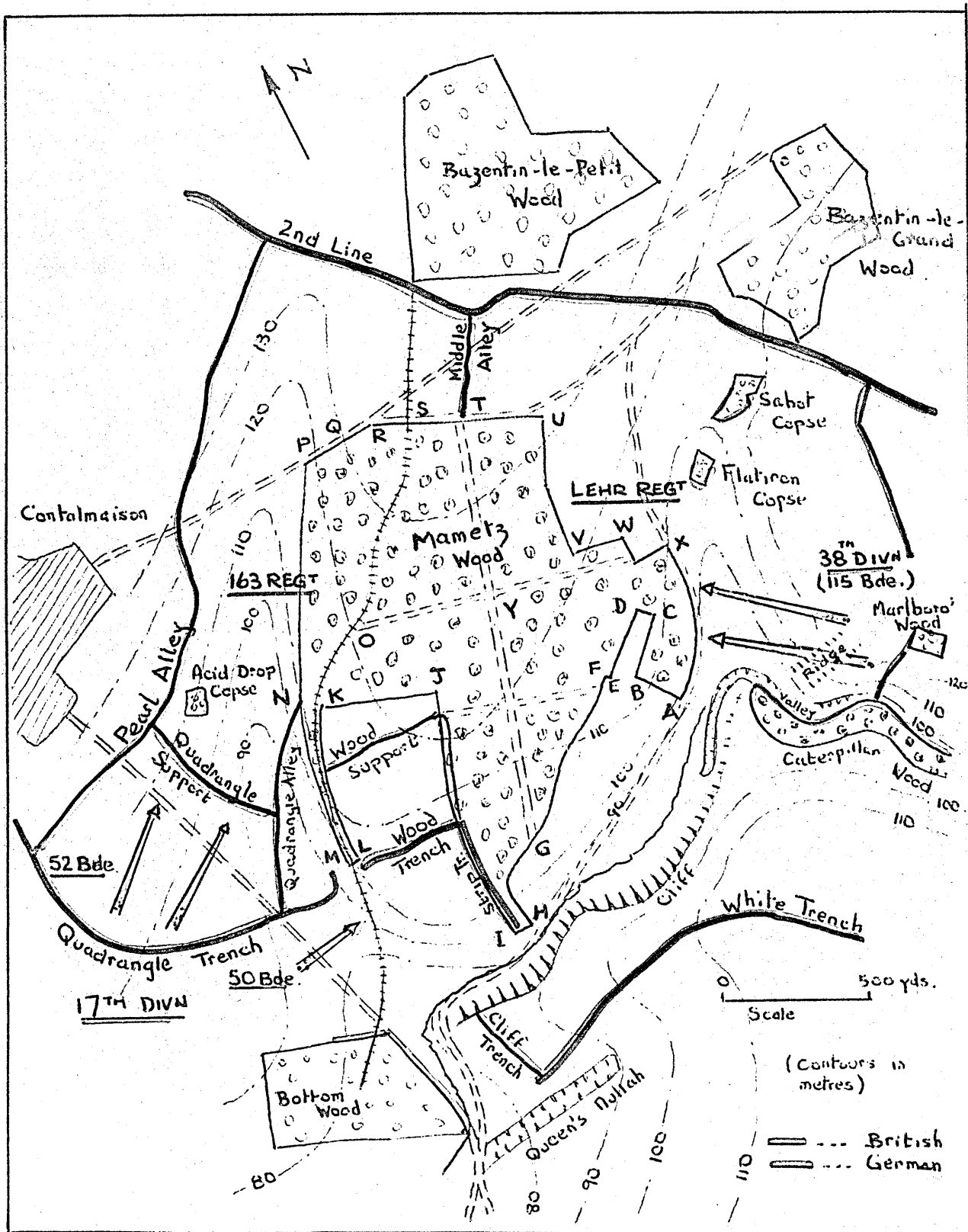
To the west of Mametz Wood the keystone of the German defences was a well-constructed trench known as the Kaisergraben which ran south of Contalmaison towards the western face of Mametz Wood. Behind it lay a network of subsidiary trenches protecting the whole of the southwestern flank of the wood (see Map 8). Some of these were connected to the wood and, so long as this remained in German hands, the trenches could be readily reinforced, or evacuated, as the situation demanded. The Kaisergraben itself had been constructed well before the opening of the battle of the Somme and was provided with good dug-outs cut twenty feet down into the chalk.¹³ Not surprisingly, it proved difficult to capture but on the night of 4/5th July the 17th Division, in co-operation with the 7th Division which attacked Wood Trench, captured that portion of it between Pearl Alley and Wood Trench and renamed it Quadrangle Trench. Wood Trench itself - the site of Siegfried Sassoon's 'reckless brandishings' - remained in German hands.

There was no similar defensive network of trenches to the east of Mametz Wood; nor was one necessary. At this point, the German second line sloped down the face of the ridge and from this position, and from Sabot and Flatiron Copses, German machine guns could easily command the eastern approaches to the wood.

5th-6th July

On the night of 5th/6th July the XV Corps had two divisions in the line: on the left, the 17th (Northern) Division (Maj.-Gen. Pilcher), which had already been heavily engaged in the fighting, held Quadrangle Trench up to its junction with Quadrangle Alley; on the right, the 38th Division (113th and 115th Brigades) held Bottom Wood, Cliff Trench and most of White Trench. Both divisions were backed by artillery from the divisions which had been in the line before them; the 21st Division artillery covering the 17th Division on the left and the 7th Division artillery covering the 38th Division on the right. At that time, the boundary between XV Corps and XIII Corps lay on the western edge of Caterpillar Wood, the whole of which was occupied by the 18th Division (XIII Corps).

On 6th July, in preparation for the next day's attack by XV Corps, there was a general shuffle to the right, the 17th (Northern) Division



MAP 9. ATTACK ON MAMETZ WOOD. 7TH JULY 1916.

taking over Bottom Wood, and the 38th (Welsh) Division the western half of Caterpillar Wood and also Marlborough Wood (the most forward position of all). Facing them were units of the German 3rd Guards Division and the 28th Reserve Division.¹⁴ Mametz Wood itself was held by a battalion of the Lehr Regiment of the Prussian Guard, another battalion of the regiment being in position around Flatiron Copse¹⁵. On their right, the 163rd Regiment (attached to 28th Reserve Division) defended Contalmaison and the open ground between Quadrangle Trench and the Wood.

For the 7th July, XV Corps planned a two-pronged attack upon the wood timed for 8 am, the 17th Division attacking Acid Drop Copse and the strip of wood LMNK from the west (see Map 9) and the 38th Division attacking the 'hammerhead' (AXCB on Map 9) on the eastern side of the wood. Once they had entered the wood both divisions were to advance on the central ride (see Map 9) before swinging northward up through the wood, the 38th Division being given the additional task of sweeping across the southern portion of the wood to take Strip Trench in the rear. As a preliminary to the main attack, and to protect their left flank, the 17th Division were to attack and capture Quadrangle Support Trench and those parts of Pearl Alley and Quadrangle Alley leading up to it. This was to be done under cover of darkness starting at 2 am after an intense artillery bombardment of the enemy positions. It was assumed that this attack, completely unsupported on either flank and against strongly defended positions would be successful, if not at first, at least as the night wore on. The only concession to failure was that the main attack would be postponed from 8 am to 8.30 am if at that time Quadrangle Trench was still in enemy hands. This contingency plan was known as Scheme B.¹⁶

The main attack was to be preceded by a heavy bombardment of the German second line, and of strong points in and around the wood, to a rigorous timetable laid down by the Artillery Commander of the XV Corps.¹⁷ The bombardment was to start at 7.20 am and last for 40 minutes. Both supporting divisional artilleries (the 21st on the left, now reinforced by one artillery brigade from 38th Division; the 7th on the right) were to 'search' the wood thoroughly during this time using every available 4.5" Howitzer and 18-pounder, with concentrated fire on those edges of the wood which were to come under attack from the infantry. In this preliminary bombardment special attention was to be paid to Acid Drop Copse on the left and Flatiron and Sabot Copses on the right which were known to harbour German machine guns. The Corps heavy artillery would

back up by bombarding the same targets and the massive 9.2" batteries would register slowly on the German second line. Once the attack had been launched all guns would be lifted by strict timetable ahead of the supposed position of the advancing infantry, until by 9.30 all fire would be concentrated outside the wood. In the event of Scheme B being put into operation, the artillery would concentrate initially on the area around Quadrangle Support before moving on to the original programme phased back by half an hour.

On the 38th Division front, the task of attacking the wood fell to Brigadier-General H J Evans and his 115th Brigade. At 8 am on 6 July - two hours before XV Corps issued their detailed orders - the GS0 1 of the 38th Division (Lt.Col. ap Rhys Pryce) arrived at Brigade Headquarters and gave Brig.-Gen. Evans a brief outline of his task, namely to attack the south-east portion of the wood from Caterpillar Wood at 8 am the following morning. No mention was made of an advance to the central ridge or of the subsequent drive northward through the wood, and it is possible that the GS01 was not at this time fully aware of the extent of the XV Corps plans.

Together, Evans and Rhys Pryce went over to Caterpillar Wood to reconnoitre the ground. On the way, they were told by a neighbouring Brigade that nothing definite was known about the number of German troops in Mametz Wood but that it appeared to be held right up to the edges, though not in any great strength. When they reached Caterpillar Wood, the Brigadier reconnoitred the ground immediately to the north and west of the wood, while the GS01 went on to Marlborough Wood. During his reconnaissance, Brig.-Gen. Evans observed that troops could be safely formed up in a dip in the ground north of Caterpillar Wood provided they were not pushed too far up the hill towards Bazentin-le-Grand Wood. It also became clear to him that as the attack would have to be made over ground which could easily be swept by machine gun fire from the north, it would be prudent to keep as close as possible to the valley running along the northern edge of Caterpillar Wood (Map 9), and to attack on a narrow frontage, one battalion wide, supported by machine guns and Trench mortars in Caterpillar and Marlborough Woods. When he met up with Col. Pryce later, Brig.-Gen. Evans explained his plans and pointed out where he would form up his four battalions in the valley before the attack. He asked the GS01 to make "special provision" for his right flank to protect it from machine gun fire.¹⁸ The two men

then parted, the GS01 returning to prepare divisional orders, Brigadier Evans to arrange the disposition of his battalions. He reached his headquarters between 2 and 3 pm in the afternoon and immediately ordered his Machine Gun and Trench Mortar Commanders to make their own reconnaissance and report back. He alerted the Commanding Officers of the 16th Welsh (Cardiff City) Battalion (which he intended to lead the attack), the 11th SWB (2nd Gwent) and the 10th SWB (1st Gwent), which were to be in support, telling them also to make a reconnaissance and stand by for further orders. The Officer Commanding the 16th Welsh, realising that the right of his battalion would be exposed to fire from Flatiron Copse, asked to be allowed to assemble in the dark and attack at first light. He had to be told that plans were synchronized with those of the 17th Division and that it was too late to change.¹⁹

Later that afternoon, Major-General Philipps visited Brigade HQ briefly and hinted at the possibility of a more ambitious objective than the 'hammerhead' at the edge of the wood. Pressed for details, he said they would all appear in Divisional orders which would be issued shortly.²⁰ Soon after he had gone, Brigade received a message to move the 16th Welsh and 11 SWB into their preliminary positions near Loop Trench (Map 8) by 9 pm and then on to Caterpillar Wood by 2 am on 7 July. Brig.-Gen. Evans went off to supervise their assembly leaving draft orders for the attack with his Brigade Major who was instructed to issue them, with any necessary corrections, as soon as Divisional orders had been received.

Divisional orders were in fact issued at 8.30 pm. The assembly points given for the four battalions were roughly as discussed earlier between Brig.-Gen. Evans and the GS01, ie two battalions in Caterpillar Wood valley, one in Caterpillar Wood itself and one in reserve a little further back towards Montauban Alley and Loop Trench,²¹ but on hearing of these dispositions Corps HQ immediately intervened:

The Corps Commander considers that it is dangerous to collect more than two battalions in the Western end of Caterpillar Wood and valleys in the vicinity owing to the danger of hostile shell fire if the troops are overcrowded. Two battalions are sufficient for the attack on the eastern projection of the Wood with a third in support in Montauban Alley and a fourth further back. Any further reinforcements required in the wood should enter by the southern tongue-[H on map 9] - which the Division should be able to capture without difficulty when the troops have entered the wood from the east, and assisted by those from

the west, are clearing up the southern portion of the wood.²²

Divisional orders were amended accordingly. Brig.-Gen. Evans arrived back at his Headquarters at 11 pm to find his Brigade Major struggling to reconcile the draft Brigade orders with those from Division. Evans was appalled when he saw the detail and complexity of Divisional orders. Capt. Wyn Griffith, on the Brigade staff, witnessed his reaction:

The General was cursing... at his orders. He said that only a madman could have issued them. He called the Divisional Staff a lot of plumbers, herring-gutted at that. He argued at the time and asked for some control over the artillery that is going to cover us but he got nothing out of them.²³

This is perhaps a little hard on the Divisional staff whose orders merely repeated, with some elaboration, those given earlier in the day by Corps Headquarters. The rigid artillery programme was none of their doing and some of the elaboration — for a smoke screen to be laid south of Flatiron and Sabot Copses, ^{for example —} was distinctly helpful and in accordance with Brig.-Gen. Evans own request. However it was not just the artillery programme which worried Evans. He was aghast at what he took to be instructions to attack on a two battalion frontage when he had been at such pains to explain to the GS01 his reasons for wanting only one battalion in the front line. 'It appears to me now', he was to write later, 'that the dispositions were all cut and dried by Divisional HQ and that the reconnaissance was simply made to satisfy them and that I was a mere figurehead. This is borne out by the fact that in Divisional orders the dispositions of each infantry unit of the Brigade were laid down. I was given no discretion in the matter. These dispositions were the first intimation that the attack was to be made on a two battalion frontage'.²⁴ There is in fact, no evidence that this is what Divisional HQ intended. An examination of the orders issued on 6th July shows no reference at all to the position of battalions at the moment of attack, only to their dispositions beforehand in and around Caterpillar Wood.²⁵

Be that as it may, Brig.-Gen. Evans faced the formidable task of implementing within a few short hours, a plan far more ambitious and much more detailed than anything he had been led to expect and which, as he saw it, required a complete revision of all his previous plans. He worked as quickly as possible to produce new orders but it was 2 am (7th July) before they were issued. Under the revised arrangements,

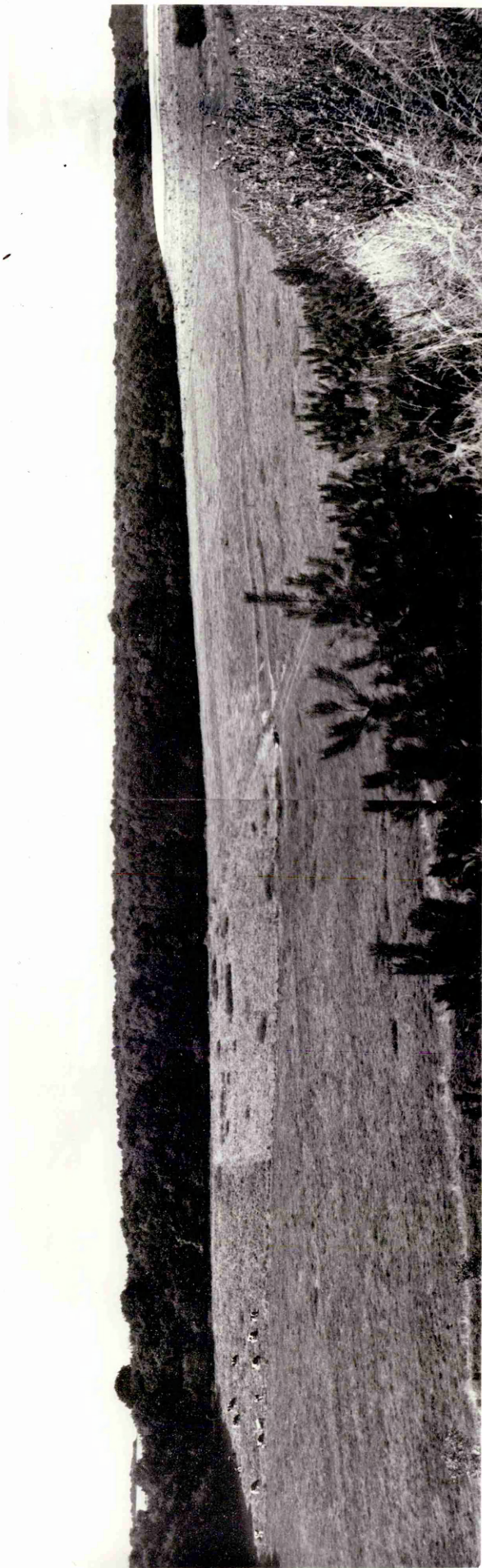


PLATE 1. MAMETZ WOOD AS IT IS TODAY.

(FROM THE CLIFF, SHOWING THE OPEN GROUND

ACROSS WHICH THE 38TH DIVISION ATTACKED ON 10TH JULY 1916.)

11th South Wales Borderers were to be on the left of the attack (with their left flank as close as possible to Caterpillar Wood) and 16th Welsh Battalion on the right, each facing North West and each covering about 250 yards of frontage. As the right of the 16th Welsh would now be perilously close to the German-held Flatiron Copse, they were to form up under cover of the smoke barrage arranged for 7.45 am.²⁶

As soon as these orders had been issued, Brig.-Gen. Evans left to rearrange the position of his troops.

7th July

Early in the morning on the 7th, the 17th Division on the left launched its attack on Quadrangle support. Two battalions of the 52nd Brigade had been chosen for this attack, the 50th Brigade being held in readiness for the 8 am assault on the Western face of Mametz Wood. It had rained during the previous afternoon and again during the night²⁷ and the clinging mud made movement difficult. As the two battalions moved out of their trenches at 2 am flares lit up the darkness and the advancing troops came under machine gun fire from Quadrangle Support, which was held in great force by the Germans who were themselves preparing to counter attack at about the same time. Hampered by their own shells, which were falling short, the leading waves managed to reach the German wire only to find it still intact in spite of a heavy artillery bombardment. They fell back and eventually withdrew. At 4 am the Germans counter-attacked the British left flank but were repulsed. Heavy fighting continued for some hours and 'greatly interfered with preparations for the main attack'.²⁸

At 5.25 am, the 17th Division received further orders from Corps announcing that Scheme B was to be put into operation and that another attack on Quadrangle Support should take place as arranged at 8 am. The two remaining battalions of the 52nd Brigade were brought into action but in broad daylight and across open ground they had little chance of succeeding where a night attack had failed. Heavy fire from machine guns perched high above them in Mametz Wood cut them down as they moved into the attack and casualties were very high. Again, the attackers withdrew.

Meanwhile, just before 7 am Brig-Gen Evans, who had been out all night organising his troops in Caterpillar Wood, went up to his new temporary headquarters at Pommiers Redoubt on the Mametz-Montauban road. From here there was a good view of Mametz Wood about a mile away, though not of the forming-up position, which was hidden by the immediate foreground:

We had reached the high ground at Pommiers Redoubt, and, standing in a trench, scanning the Wood with our glasses, it seemed as thick as a virgin forest. There was no sign of life in it, no one could say whether it concealed ten thousand men or ten machine guns. Its edges were clean cut, as far as the eye could see; and the ground between us and the wood was bare of cover. Our men were assembled in trenches above a dip in the ground, and from these they were to advance, descend into the hollow, and cross the bare slope in the teeth of the machine-gunners in the wood. On their right, as they advanced across the bullet-swept zone, they would be exposed to enfilade fire, for the direction of their advance was nearly parallel to the German trenches towards Bazentin, and it would be folly to suppose that the German machine-guns were not sited to sweep that slope leading to the Wood.²⁹

Soon after he arrived, Brig-Gen Evans received news that the attack was retimed for 8.30 am (Scheme B) and sent this information on to the battalions. He was also asked to get in touch with the Officer appointed by Corps to arrange the smoke barrage, but as the officer, and the whereabouts of his unit were unknown to those at Brigade HQ, his staff failed to locate him.³⁰

At 8 o'clock Capt. Griffith watched the artillery begin its bombardment of the edge of the Wood:

A thousand yards from where I stood, our two battalions were waiting. I read the orders again. The attack was to be carried out in three stages, beginning at half-past eight, reaching in succession three points inside the Wood, under the protection of an artillery barrage. Smoke screens were to be formed here and there. Everything sounded so simple and easy.

A few minutes after eight, all our telephone wires to the battalions were cut by the enemy's reply to our fire. There was no smoke screens for some reason never explained - perhaps someone forgot about it. This was the first departure from the simplicity of the spoken word. Messages came through, a steady trickle of runners bringing evil news, our fire had not masked the German machine-guns in Mametz Wood, nor in the wood near Bazentin. The elaborate timetable suddenly became a thing of no meaning as ³¹ unrelated to our condition as one of Napoleon's orders

The attack had in fact been launched at 8.30 am as planned but it was 9.20 am before even this simple piece of news reached Brigade HQ. As soon as the guns had stopped, the leading waves of the 16th Welsh and 11th SWB Battalions had moved over the hill and down the slope towards Mametz Wood. Immediately, they came under withering fire from the Wood and from Flatiron and Sabot Copses. About 200-300 yards from the Wood, the attack petered out and the leading troops took what cover they could in a line of shell holes. The successive waves in turn came under heavy fire and were withdrawn back over the crest and into comparative safety.³²

Private William Joshua who was with a Lewis Machine gun team in the 16th Welsh battalion was in one of the leading waves:

Number 4 platoon A company led the attack, our Lewis gun was on the left flank to prevent them being cut off.

We advanced about 50 yards when the German Machine Guns opened up. Sergeant Harries shouted out they are yards high and it appeared so, then going down a gentle slope to the wood the enemy got range with deadly effect.

One of my gun team gave me the signal to take a casualty's place in the team, and as I struggled on, I felt a severe shock in my thigh and I was down looking for my leg, thinking I had lost it. Another platoon came along and rested for a breather leaving about 10 casualties behind including a sergeant from the Cycle Company of which a number had joined us to bring us up to strength. Each wave passing me left its quota of dead behind.

Our company runner came along and asked me where Capt. Herdman was, as the order was to retire. I replied that he was somewhere ahead. A large number of our planes were flying low.

Now the German and our own artillery started up, and to add to the horror rain started to fall heavily making the churned up ground into clinging mud. I dumped my equipment and started to crawl back, hugging the ground. Some stretcher bearers found me and took me to a large shell hole. They were members of the Tylorstown Silver Band who had enlisted en bloc in our early recruiting days..... My two sergeants, Harries and Thomas were killed also my closest pals G. Leyshon and Reg Davies. Two brothers Tregaskis died. They were always first on parade when we formed in Porthcawl; made Corporals the same day; officers the same day and died together.³³

Brigade HQ, desperate for news, had despatched the Staff Captain (Capt. H V Hinton) to Caterpillar Wood at 8.45 am. His first report, written at about 9.30 am, was received forty minutes later. He confirmed that troops were digging in about 300 yards from the Wood and suggested another artillery bombardment. This was immediately relayed

to the artillery Group Commander. Brig-Gen Evans also instructed his machine-gun company to push more guns towards Caterpillar Wood in an attempt to stifle the deadly fire from the north. By 9.50 am however things were getting worse. The Germans had intensified their machine-gun activity and were opening up with artillery on the troops out in the open. Casualties were mounting steadily and the 10th South Wales Borderers were ordered up to reinforce the two leading battalions.³⁴ Their progress across the maze of trenches was considerably hampered by heavy mud and it was well into the afternoon before they arrived in the battle area.³⁵

Meanwhile, both XV Corps and 38th Division HQs were preparing for another artillery bombardment. At 10.20 am Corps informed Maj-General Philipps that the Heavy Artillery would bombard the eastern portion of Mametz Wood from 10.45 until 11.15 am and added, oblivious to the earlier mix-up, that if the Division 'wanted more smoke barrage they could employ the special party which was with them'. The Division was also told to support the attack by fire from the Divisional artilleries which had the advantage of direct observation which the Heavy Artillery did not.³⁶ The news of a fresh bombardment was quickly passed to Brigade HQ and thence to the battalions, but there was no chance of it reaching them in time:

We were a thousand yards away from the battalions, with no telephone communications; there were maps at Divisional HQ, they knew where we were and they knew that our lines were cut. A simple sum in arithmetic our operation was isolated; no-one was attacking on either flank of our Brigade, so that there was complete freedom of choice as to time. With all the hours of the clock to choose from, some master-mind must needs select the only hour to be avoided.³⁷

Fortunately, by 11 am the telephone wires had been repaired and the Officer Commanding 16th Welsh Battalion (Lt.Col. Smith) was able to report that although British shells were falling on his troops he was nevertheless advancing slowly. The artillery bombardment again failed to knock out the machine-guns and mounting casualties soon brought the attack to a halt. In the afternoon, the fresh troops of the 10th South Wales Borderers for a time brought new vigour to the offensive but their commanding officer, Lt Col Wilkinson, was killed bringing the men forward and once more the advance faded away.

On instructions from XV Corps, Divisional HQ ordered Brigade to make a third attack at 5 pm, insisting that this time troops must go into the wood, the eastern edge of which would be heavily bombarded for thirty minutes beforehand.³⁸ These orders did not reach Brigade HQ until 4 pm and as the telephone wires had again been cut, Brig.-Gen Evans decided to go down to Caterpillar Wood himself to reorganise the attack and push in the last Battalion (the 17th Royal Welsh Fusiliers). He took Capt Griffith with him:

The heavy rains of the preceding days had turned the chalky soil into a stiff glue. The hurry in our minds accentuated the slowness of our progress, and I felt as if some physical force was dragging me back. Haste meant a fall into a shell hole, for we had abandoned the attempt to move along the trench, Shrapnel was bursting overhead, and a patter of machine-gun bullets spat through the air. We passed through Caterpillar Wood..... along the bare ridge rising up to Mametz Wood our men were burrowing into the ground with their entrenching tools seeking whatever cover they might make. A few shells were falling, surprisingly few. Wounded men were crawling back from the ridge, men were crawling forward with ammunition. No attack could succeed over such ground as this, swept from front and side by machine-guns at short range.³⁹

By now it was 4.40 pm and the battalions were very disorganised; casualties among the officers had been high and the men were exhausted and seemed, to Brig-Gen Evans, to be somewhat shaken. Brig-Gen Evans called the commanding officers together and ordered them to prepare for an attack on the wood at all costs with the two freshest battalions (10 SWB and 17 RWF) in the front line. By the time the battalions had reorganised however the effect of the artillery bombardment had worn off, and machine-guns and trench mortars were still not disposed to Evans' satisfaction. He could see that defences on the edge of Mametz Wood were still intact and that the artillery had fired too deeply into the wood. Realising that a co-ordinated effort by infantry and artillery would take time to organise, and that success without it was unlikely, he decided to postpone his attack until the evening or even the following morning.⁴⁰ Using a field telephone connected to the Heavy Artillery at Pommiers Redoubt, he urged this course of action on 38th Division Headquarters. Division consulted Corps. At 6.40 pm XV Corps HQ telephoned to 38th Division telling them 'to withdraw and reorganise the Battalions engaged at the south east corner of Mametz Wood and to make adequate arrangements for holding the line during the night'.⁴¹ The 17th RWF was detailed

to hold the original line on Caterpillar Wood and the three tired battalions, which had between them suffered more than 400 casualties, returned to their bivouacs during the early hours of the following morning.

On the way back to Pommiers Redoubt, Brig-Gen Evans, thoroughly exhausted by 36 hours of strenuous activity, unburdened himself to Capt. Griffith:

I spoke my mind about the whole business... you heard me. They wanted us to press on at all costs, talked about determination, and suggested that I didn't realise the importance of the operation. As good as told me that I was tired and didn't want to tackle the job. Difficult to judge on the spot, they said! As if the whole trouble hadn't arisen because someone found it so easy to judge when he was six miles away and had never seen the country, and couldn't read a map. You mark my words, they'll send me home for this: they want butchers, not brigadiers. They'll remember now that I told them, before we began, that the attack could not succeed unless the machine guns were masked. I shall be in England in a month.

Six weeks later he went home⁴² but there is no evidence that he was relieved of his command for outspokenness or for any obvious want of determination, for these faults were usually rewarded with instant dismissal, as happened to Brigadiers Oxley and Fell of the neighbouring 23rd and 17th Divisions. There was no shortage of replacements, and no qualms about changing a commander at the height of a battle:

I was with many others a 'vulture' waiting in Amiens to get a brigade [wrote Brig-Gen Trotter after the war]. My turn came on 6 July to take over command of 51st Brigade..... I do think, looking back, it is rather hard on a brigade to be taken over by a complete stranger in the middle of very confused fighting. I know I felt for Fell, my predecessor in command, when I arrived at his BHQ, and he was unaware that he was superseded by me, and of which I had to inform him.⁴³

When Evans left the 115th Brigade in August 1916 he was 56 years old and the Brigade was in a quiet sector of the front well away from the Somme. This would have been a natural time for giving the command to a younger man.

On the west side of the Wood, the 17th Division had fared no better. Although both preliminary assaults by the 52nd Brigade on Quadrangle Support failed to make secure the left flank, the 50th Brigade, as planned, went into action at 8.30 am. One battalion (7th East Yorks) struck at the junction of Quadrangle Alley and Quadrangle Support

trenches (Map 9) and almost succeeded in capturing it, but were driven back by bombs and by enfilade machine gun fire from Mametz Wood and from the north. They succeeded however in holding to on a point just 50 yards short of the junction. Another battalion(8th Dorset), was held ready to advance on Wood Trench, Wood Support and the western edge of Mametz Wood, once the situation around Quadrangle Support had been resolved. As little progress had been made by mid-afternoon, the 51st Brigade, now under its new commander, was brought up from reserve to replace the 52nd Brigade which had suffered heavy losses.⁴⁴

As with the 38th Division, XV Corps ordered another attack for 5 pm after a thirty minute bombardment. The Divisional commander uncertain whether or not Quadrangle Support was in his hands, argued for a postponement and Corps reluctantly agreed to give him until 6.30 pm to sort things out.⁴⁵ Eventually the 17th Division was ordered to attack at 8 pm both Quadrangle Support and the Strip of Wood at LMNK (Map 9). III Corps on their left which had earlier captured, and then lost, Contalmaison, was to make a simultaneous attack upon the village. In the words of the official historian: 'The Dorset and East Yorks went forward, the 10th Sherwood Foresters of the 51st Brigade attacking on the left at the same time. As they struggled through the mud the leading lines were smitten by machine-gun fire from the flanks and were caught by a hostile artillery barrage. There was no hope of success so the operation was abandoned'.⁴⁶ The III Corps failed to get itself ready in time for its attack on Contalmaison and this too was cancelled.⁴⁷

So by the end of the day, both III and XV Corps were back where they had been at the beginning.

It is not difficult to find reasons for the failures on 7th July. The plan itself was ill-conceived, fragmented and, as a result of communication difficulties, badly co-ordinated. On both sides of the wood, the attacking troops were exposed to enfilade fire at short range. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a more suicidal direction of attack than that chosen (by XV Corps) for the 115th Brigade: parallel to, and not far away from, the German front line. If the artillery could have knocked out every German machine gun in sight there might perhaps have been some hope of success but this

was far beyond the capacity of the Artillery in 1916. 'It is beyond dispute that on several occasions where the field artillery has made a considerable 'lift' that is to say, has outstripped the infantry advance, the enemy has been able to man his parapets with rifle and machine gun', Kiggellwrote from GHQ a few days later. XV Corps put it more bluntly:

The problem of dealing with hostile machine guns is still unsolved. Divisions will report at once any useful experience that has been gained, for the benefit of others.⁴⁸

But the operations were also badly affected by poor communications - wires between battalions and Brigades were cut on both sides of the wood - with disastrous consequences for the 115th Brigade. With three-quarters of an hour lag between the Brigade and its battalions, messages coming down from Corps to Division, to Brigade, to battalion crossed messages on their way up, to the general confusion of all. On this side of the Wood too it is arguable that too many levels of Command were involved. Divisional HQ, with only one Brigade in action, was sandwiched ineffectively between XV Corps and 115th Brigade, contributing little but adding to the general delay. Indeed, it might have been better if XV Corps, once they had realised that co-ordination between 17th Division and 38th Division was more or less impossible ('38th Division when last heard of were about 200 yards from the Wood' they signalled 17th Division lamely at one point)⁴⁹ had left the conduct of the battle in the hands of Brigade commanders. This would at least have allowed Brig-Gen Evans to shorten his own lines of communication by moving down to Caterpillar Wood earlier than he did, though whether he would have been able to achieve anything without direct control over the artillery (which he wanted) was questionable, and there was little chance of XV Corps giving him that. The view of the artillery high command was that 'the full destructive power of the available artillery must not be sacrificed to, nor be impeded by the whims of subordinate commanders'.⁵⁰

The lack of smoke - again due to faulty or inadequate communications between Corps and Brigade - also contributed in a big way to the failure of the 115th Brigade. The battalions had been ordered before the attack to form up 'as soon as the smoke barrage on the eastern edge of Mametz Wood and around Flatiron Copse and Sabot Copse is formed' (Brigade Order No 62) and it is likely that the failure of the

smoke barrage to materialise upset the inexperienced battalion commanders so that the all important first attack lacked sting. But probably the biggest factor of all was the haste with which the plans, such as they were, had to be carried out. 'It was a deliberate attack which required careful preparation and personal reconnaissance of the whole area by me with my COs', Brig-Gen Evans wrote afterwards. 'This it was physically impossible to do' (ie in the time available). He added that the position chosen for his brigade Headquarters, which he had never seen till he took up his position for the attack 'was such that no personal observation could be obtained of the progress of the attack'.⁵¹

Higher Command however made no allowances. Haig's Chief of Staff wrote to Rawlinson pointing out that 'the C in C did not consider the withdrawal from CONTALMAISON on the 7th and the failure of the 38th Division to capture MAMETZ WOOD were creditable performances'.⁵² On the 8th, Haig wrote in his diary:

The 38th Welsh Division, which had been ordered to attack Mametz Wood had not advanced with determination to the attack. General Horne, Commanding XV Corps, is enquiring into General Philipps' conduct as Divisional GOC. The artillery preparation was..... reported as 'highly satisfactory'.....⁵³.

Rawlinson was also disappointed. 'A day of heavy fighting without very much success' he wrote in his journal on the evening of the 7th. 'We took Contalmaison in the morning but failed to get into Mametz Wood. Prisoners tell us the Boshes are in a state of chaos but their machine gunners seem to go on fighting all right. In the pm we lost Contalmaison without sufficient excuse I think as it is reported we were shelled out. I have ordered both attacks to be renewed. It is raining hard tonight. We must go on pressing the Boshe now they are getting tired as fresh troops may be brought up....' ⁵⁴.

8th-9th July

On 8th July, the 17th Division continued to hammer away at Quadrangle Support trench, again without success although they mounted two full-scale attacks during the day. The 38th Division was ordered to make a quiet raid during the night of 7th/8th on 'something like a Company front, not necessarily by the whole Company'. 'The place', said XV Corps, 'must be chosen by the Commander of the 113th Brigade now holding the line, who should carry out the raid and fix the

exact point. Neither Corps nor Division, not being on the spot, could fix this'.⁵⁵ Shortly after midnight, Corps learned that Brig-Gen Price-Davies (113th Brigade) was preparing to make an attack on Strip Trench using a whole battalion. Horne immediately telephoned 38th Division HQ to say that what he wanted that day was a small scale probe of the southern defences and not 'an isolated attack by one battalion on point H'.⁵⁶ A few hours later he went over to 38th Division HQ personally to discuss the situation and then ordered a night attack on Strip Trench to be exploited the following day.⁵⁷ This attack, timed for 2 am, failed to materialise. Corps demanded to know why and so did Fourth Army; Division asked Brigade. They said that the orders arrived at the Battalion too late to be executed, the 14 Royal Welsh Fusiliers having reported by orderly that trenches leading to the starting point of attack had been so congested that they had failed to get there in time.⁵⁸

This was too much for Lt-Gen Horne. When Haig and Rawlinson visited XV Corps HQ on the 9th he told them that he 'was very disappointed with the work of the 17th Division (Pilcher) and 38th Division (Philipps)'. 'Both these officers have been removed', Haig wrote in his diary that evening. 'In the case of the latter division although the wood had been most adequately bombarded, [ie on 7th July], the division never entered the wood, and in the whole division the total casualties for the 24 hours was under 150!'.⁵⁹

Maj-Gen Philipps had in fact received his marching orders at 11 o'clock that morning. At the suggestion of Fourth Army HQ, Horne decided to put the 38th Division temporarily under the command of Maj-Gen Watts, GOC 7th Division, then in reserve. He was given freedom to 'dispose of the 38th Division as he wished, keeping any Brigades he wanted, or using them as required'.⁶⁰

The news of Ivor Philipps removal soon reached Lloyd George, the new Secretary of State for War, in London. He wrote to his brother on 11th July giving news of the Division. 'Unfortunately', he wrote, 'the General has broken down in health and he returned home last night bringing with him his ADC Lt Gwilym Lloyd George'.⁶¹

With this cloud hanging over it, and with a new General and his staff in command, the 38th (Welsh) Division prepared for its next attack on Mametz Wood.

NOTES ON CHAPTER THREE

Epigraph: David Jones, In Parenthesis 1937 p 138

1. WO 95/431 Fourth Army Operation Order 32/3/16(G) dated 3rd July.
2. WO 95/431 Fourth Army Operation Order 32/3/23(G) dated 5th July.
3. Haig MS. Diary entry for 4th July.
4. Haig MS. Diary entry for 8th July.
5. Rawlinson MS. RWLN 1/6, item 87d. Kiggell to Rawlinson. 8 July.
6. Rawlinson MS. RWLN 1/5. Journal entry for 9th July.
7. Haig MS. Diary entry for 11th July.
8. Haig MS. Diary entry for 12th July. An interesting contemporary analysis of the alternatives is to be found among the Fourth Army papers (WO 95/431, File A). According to this, the possibility of an attack northward from Mametz Wood was rejected because 'it would be on a narrow front, which 2 years' experience had proved to be unsound: moreover, even if successful, the ground gained would form so pronounced a salient that the enemy would probably be able to concentrate such a heavy fire on to it as to render it very difficult to hold'.
9. Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer London 1930, p 64. Sassoon was viewing Mametz Wood from Quadrangle Trench.
10. The irregular shape makes it difficult to calculate the area exactly. The figure of 220 acres is an estimate made by The Times correspondent in a despatch dated 12 July and published 2 days later.
11. WO 95/2539 Appendix X to 38 Division diary for July 1916.
12. *ibid*
13. Army Quarterly. Vol 9 No 2 Jan. 1925. p 247 (from German Regimental records).
14. Reichs archivs monograph Somme-Nord: Band 20 in the series Schlachten des Weltkrieges 1927. (Maps 27 and 28.)
15. Army Quarterly Vol. 9 No.2 p.248. At the outbreak of war the Lehr (training) battalion of the Prussian Guard - an instructional unit attached to the 1st Guards Brigade - was expanded into a full regiment of three battalions. German regiments, unlike their British counterparts, fought as complete units, 3 or 4 regiments of 3 battalions each in one division.

16. WO 95/2539. 38th Division copy of XV Corps Operation Order No.15 (issued 10 am 6th July).
17. WO 95/2539. XV Corps Artillery Operation Order No 14, issued 6 July.
18. Evans MS.
19. TO Marden, History of the Welsh Regiment pp. 382-383.
20. Evans MS.
21. WO 95/2539. 38 Division Order No 36 issued 8.30 pm on 6th July 1916. Appendix VII.
22. WO 95/921. XV Corps diary for 6 July, entry for 7.40 pm *My italics.*
23. Llewelyn Wyn Griffith, Up to Mametz, London 1931, p 196.
24. Evans MS.
25. WO 95/2539. 38th Division Operation Order No 36 and modifying order No G260. Appendices VII and X. The latter, which could give rise to misunderstanding (especially if looked at out of context), reads as follows:

For the first five lines of para. 3 (of Order No 36) substitute:

The general plan of attack will be:- 115th Infantry in position in CATERPILLAR WOOD by 2 am. A third Battalion will be MONTAUBAN ALLEY, and the fourth battalion near the LOOP. The last two should be in position by 6 am.

In neither order is anything further said about the disposition of infantry battalions.

26. WO 95/2560, 115th Brigade diary Appendix. Brigade Operation Order No 62 (dated 6.7.16).
27. WO 95/5. GHQ Meteorological Section Weather Diary (Appendix D to War Diary for July 1916).
28. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol.2 p 30. The 17th Division War Diary (WO 95/1981) gives a similar, though slightly less detailed, account.
29. Griffith, Up to Mametz p 195.
30. Evans MS.
31. Griffith, Up to Mametz pp 198-199. This account is confirmed by the 115 Brigade diary (WO 95/2560) and other sources. Edmonds (op.cit) attributes the lack of smoke to high winds but it seems more probable that it was due to lack of communication between Brigade HQ and the RE Stokes Mortar unit despatched by Corps HQ to provide the smoke barrage.

32. Marden, History of the Welsh Regiment. pp 383-4.
33. Letter to the author, January 1974.
34. WO 95/2560 115th Brigade diary.
35. C T Atkinson, History of the South Wales Borderers London 1931. p. 244. Atkinson says that the 10th SWB did not arrive until just before 3 pm but other sources - particularly the brigade diary - make it clear that they arrived sooner than this and were in action by 2.15 pm.
36. WO 95/921. XV Corps diary entries for 10.10 and 10.20 am
My italics.
37. Griffith, Up to Mametz, p 199. The 115th Brigade diary records 'at 10.25 am the GOC was informed that another artillery bombardment would take place at 10.45 am and would last for half an hour'.
38. WO 95/2560 115th Brigade diary. Appendix VI: Copy of wire from 38th Division timed 2.18 pm (but, according to the diary, not received until 4.4 pm).
39. Griffith, Up to Mametz, p 200-201.
40. Evans MS and 115th Brigade diary (WO 95/2560).
41. WO 95/921. XV Corps War Diary. Entry for 6.40 pm.
42. Griffith, Up to Mametz p 205-206.
43. CAB 45/191 Letter from Brig-Gen Trotter dated 2 April 1930.
44. WO 95/1981. 17th Division War diary. This account is reasonably consistent with that in the 50th Brigade diary (WO 95/1998) and in the anonymous History of the 50th Infantry Brigade 1914-1919 printed for private circulation in 1919.
45. WO 95/921. XV Corps diary. Entry for 4.5 pm.
46. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol 2. p 31
47. WO 95/921. XV Corps diary. Entry for 10.52 pm.
48. WO 95/2560. 115th Brigade diary annexes (OA 256 of 16th July 1961 from Lt-Gen Kiggell to all Armies; XV Corps No 125 G of 11th July 1916 to all divisions). Kiggell's note goes on to say:
An infantry Brigadier whose command has met with conspicuous success, ascribes it largely to the fact that his men have insisted in advancing close under the field artillery fire, even at the risk of an occasional casualty from our own guns, his men were thus enabled to gain an enemy's trench almost without loss and in time to meet the defenders hand to hand as they emerged from their dug-outs and before they could mount their machine guns.

This is an early example of the use of the 'creeping barrage' which was to be used so effectively later on.

49. WO 95/921. XV Corps diary. Entry for 10.13 am.
50. Rawlins, Col. S W H 'History of the Development of British Artillery in France'. Unpublished typescript in War Office Library, p.104 gives the main artillery lessons of the Battle of the Somme 'as deduced by GOC RA, 4th Army'. I am grateful to Mr T G T Taylor for drawing attention to this source.
51. Evans MS. During his reconnaissance of Caterpillar Wood on 6th July, Evans had decided to place his HQ somewhere in the trenches behind Caterpillar Wood and he was surprised when told later that day that he was to operate from Pommiers Redoubt over a 1000 yards away.
52. WO 95/5. General Staff, General HQ War diary entry for 9th July.
53. Haig MS. Entry in diary for 8th July.
54. Rawlinson MS. Entry in journal for 7th July.
55. WO 95/921. XV Corps diary. Entry for 9.10 pm 7th July.
56. ibid Entry for 10.35 am, 8th July.
57. ibid Entry for 1.40 pm 8th July
58. WO 95/2552. 113th Brigade War diary. Entry for 3 am, 9th July.
59. Haig MS. Diary entry for 9th July. Haig's figure of 150 casualties is way below the true number. The Cardiff City Battalion alone suffered 280 casualties, including 6 officers killed.
60. WO 95/921. XV Corps War diary. Entry for 10.20 am, 9th July.
61. William George, My Brother and I London, 1958

CHAPTER FOUR. Mametz Wood: 9th-12th July 1916.

And to your front, stretched long laterally,
and receded deeply,
the dark wood.

9th July

In the early hours of 9th July, 38th Division HQ, then still under the command of Ivor Philipps, issued orders for an attack that afternoon on the southern edge of Mametz Wood from White Trench.¹ Two Brigades were to take part - the 114th Brigade (Brig-Gen Marden) on the right making the main thrust east of the central ride, the 113th Brigade (Brig-Gen Price-Davies) supporting with a simultaneous attack by one battalion on Strip Trench. Once Strip Trench and the southern-most cross-ride had been captured, the 114th Brigade was to sweep on alone northwards through the wood leaving the 113th Brigade to consolidate the south-western approaches.

By mid-day however Ivor Philipps had been relieved of his command and XV Corps decided to postpone the attack. They sent the following message to the 38th Division:

The attack being prepared by you for 4 pm this afternoon will not take place. All preparations for making that attack are to be ready by early tomorrow morning.²

The words 'by you' are significant. Previously, XV Corps had planned each attack itself in considerable detail. Now they seemed content to lay down guidelines and let Divisions work out their own tactics. Where previously they had given orders, they now gave advice, on occasions even pleading for a particular course of action to be followed. It would be tempting to put this down to lessons learned on 7th July but it is more likely that Corps HQ was simply too busy preparing for the forthcoming attack on Bazentin Ridge to spare much time for Mametz Wood.

At 2pm XV Corps sent a message to divisions urging them not to dissipate their efforts on piece-meal attacks:

All prisoners captured in the last twenty-four hours express astonishment that our infantry does not attack in greater strength instead of bombing up trenches in twos and threes. The enemy is much in confusion there being small groups here and there of every Regiment. There are some stretches of country

without any enemy in it at all. If our infantry attacked in strength they could sweep the whole of them back.... All communication trenches to the rear are smashed. This information confirms that already received from aircraft and other sources. Corps Commander impresses on all commanders the necessity of utmost vigour and determination in the attacks to be delivered today and great results which accrue therefrom. He looks to Divisional Commanders ensuring his directions on this point are carried out.³

XV Corps, were, however, still willing to fragment their own resources, and they asked 17th Division to have one last fling against Quadrangle Support Trench before being relieved in the line by the 21st Division. They urged a surprise attack that evening using troops who had been rested the previous night. 'Machine guns should not stop fresh troops if they mean to get in', they said optimistically. 'Impress upon your troops that they are going to be relieved tomorrow night, that it is up to them to make their reputation by taking the trench before they go'.

Although 23rd Division (III Corps) on the left had arranged to make another attack on Contalmaison at 6 pm this was too early for 17th Division, who in any case preferred a night attack. On the right, as we have seen, the attack by 38th Division had been postponed until the following day. No attempt was made to coordinate the efforts of these three units and the unfortunate 17th Division went into the attack again completely unsupported on either flank.

At 11 pm, the division launched the 51st Brigade against the junction of Quadrangle Support and Pearl Alley, and 50th Brigade against the junction of Quadrangle Support and Quadrangle Alley (Map 8) as it had done so many times before. After a hard night's fighting the 51st Brigade managed to capture the western half of Quadrangle Support but was soon driven back along it to the junction with Pearl Alley where it hung on grimly. The 50th Brigade however was less successful and at 3.30 am on the 10th the attack was called off.⁴

When Maj-Gen Watts assumed command of the 38th (Welsh) Division during the afternoon of the 9th July he took with him several members of his staff including his GSOL Colonel Bonham Carter who was to become the main point of contact between the Division and XV Corps. The original staff were not entirely eclipsed however and orders to the three Brigades continued to be sent out by Col Rhys Pryce who was also to do good work in the field.

Although General Watts had been given a free hand by XV Corps to dispose of Brigades as he wished, he decided not to break up the division but to employ it en masse against the southern edge of Mametz Wood, putting two Brigades into an initial attack with the third close behind. In this, he was not departing very radically from the plans previously worked out by Ivor Philipps's staff but by giving the 113th Brigade an equal part to play with the 114th Brigade he much increased the weight of attack and thus improved the chances of success. The artillery programme was however changed considerably to make use of techniques developed by both British and French in recent fighting.

Orders for the attack were ready by 5.30 pm on 9th July*. That evening, the Brigadiers of the 113th and 114th Brigades were called to Divisional Headquarters at Grovetown and given orders by a GOC and staff whom they had never seen before, to capture Mametz Wood at dawn on 10th July, zero hour being fixed for 4.15 am'.⁵ As Grovetown was 6 miles away from the Brigade HQs it was nearly midnight before Brigade staffs were fully in the picture. This gave them only 3 hours at most in which to alert battalions and move them into position, but, in contrast to the situation on 7th July, there had been ample opportunity beforehand for battalion commanders to make a reconnaissance of the approaches to the wood. That evening, Corps HQ sent the following message which was read out to all troops before dawn the next day:

The Commander in Chief has just visited the Corps Commander and has impressed upon him the great importance of the occupation by us of Mametz Wood. The Corps Commander requests that the Division and Brigade Commanders will point out to the troops of the Welsh Division the opportunity offered them of serving their King and Country at a critical period and earning for themselves great glory and distinction.⁶

The artillery programme apart, there was little subtlety in the plan of attack which relied solely on weight of numbers to overrun the German defences. There were to be no feints, no outflanking manoeuvres: just a straightforward attack in orthodox 'wave' formation across unpromising ground from White Trench south of the wood (see Map 11), down the steep embankment, across the open ground and up a gentle rise to the southern-most edge of the wood where the Germans had constructed shallow firing trenches. A distance of some 500 yards of open ground had to be covered. 114th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. Marden) was to attack east of the central ride; 113th

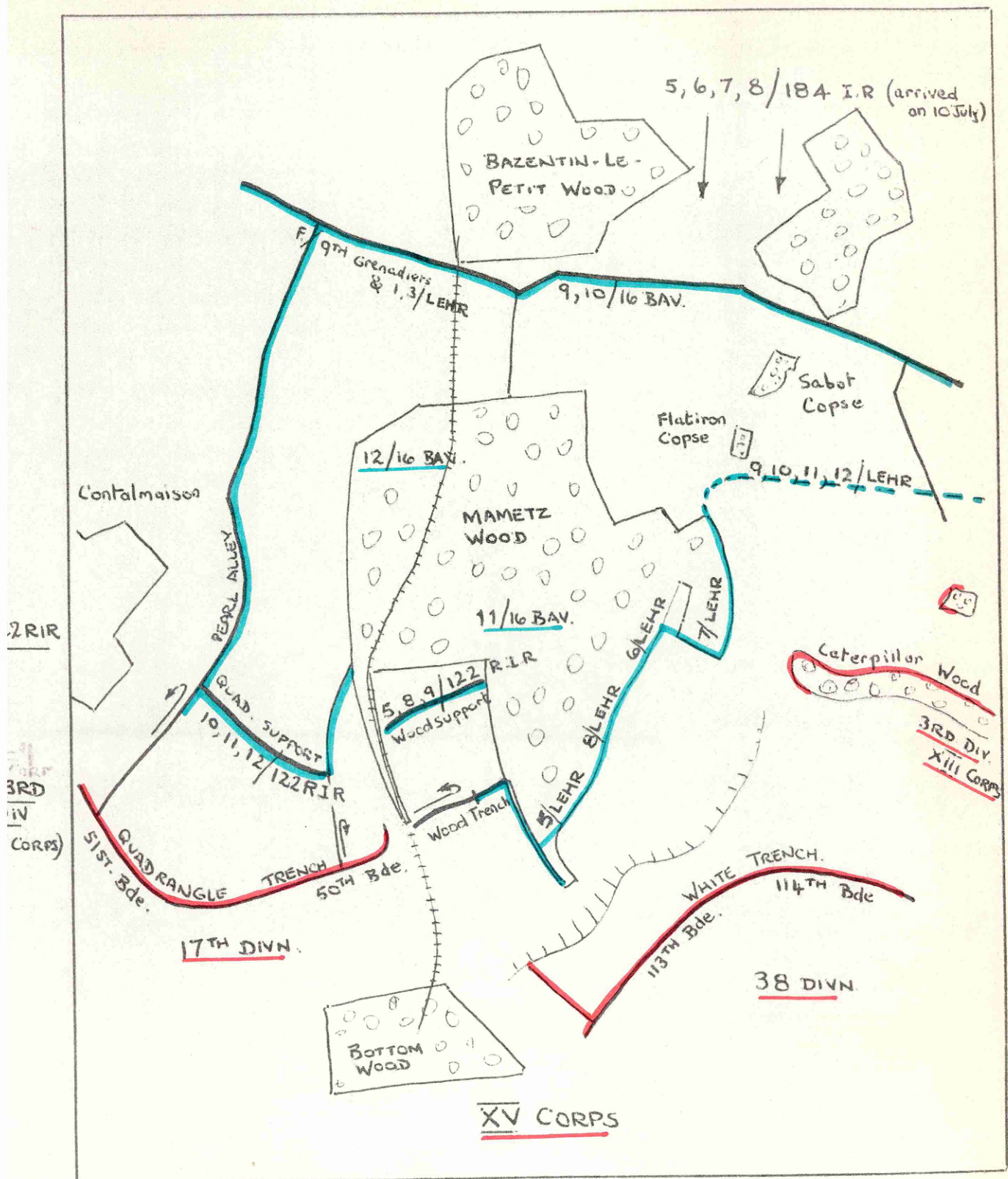
*See Annex D

Brigade (Brig-Gen Price-Davies) on its left advancing on a narrow front between Strip Trench and the central ride. The first objective was the capture by 6.15 am of the area of wood south of the first cross ride and also the 'Hammerhead'. Once in the wood, the two Brigades were to keep in touch along the central ride which would be neatly marked with red flags as the troops advanced.⁷

The artillery programme however contained two novel features. The first of these had been evolved by the French to draw enemy troops prematurely out of their dug outs and expose them to shell fire. The technique, which at that time was not in general use on the British front, was to bombard the enemy front line, lift towards the rear as if an infantry attack was about to be launched, and then drop back on the front line a few minutes later as the enemy came out to man the parapets. There were many variants, some including simulated infantry attacks, but the one adopted by the combined artilleries of the 7th and 38th Divisions was as follows:

From 3.30 am to 4 am every available 18 pounder was first to bombard the southern edge of the wood and then search back for a distance of 200 yards. From 4 am to 4.10 am the bombardment would be switched back to the edge of the wood, all 18 pounders and 4.5" howitzers firing 3 rounds per gun per minute for ten minutes and then firing as rapidly as possible for another five minutes before making the final lift in advance of the attacking infantry.

The second feature was the use of a creeping barrage, then in the early stages of development although it had been tried out tentatively as early as the battle of Loos in 1915 and had been used by XIII Corps on 1st July 1916. A barrage, as the name suggests, is not aimed at any particular target but is intended to form a barrier between the attacking infantry and enemy reinforcements. Originally it had been put down well ahead of the attacking troops - often on the enemy support trenches - but the advantages of keeping it as close as possible to the infantry had become apparent. The ultimate development was to move the barrage forward at walking pace with the infantry following very close behind. For the attack on Mametz Wood it was arranged that at 4.15 am the barrage would lift back from the edge of the wood by steps of 50 yards each minute to a line just north of the first



5, 6, 7, 8 / LEHR = II ND. BATTALION LEHR INF. REG. (FOUR COYS)
 9, 10, 11, 12 / LEHR = III RD. " " " " " "
 etc.

16 BAV. = 16TH BAVARIAN INF. REG.

122 R.I.R. = WÜRTTEMBERG. 122ND RESERVE INF. REG

184 I.R. = PRUSSIAN 184TH INF. REG

MAP 10. DISPOSITIONS

NIGHT 9/10TH JUL

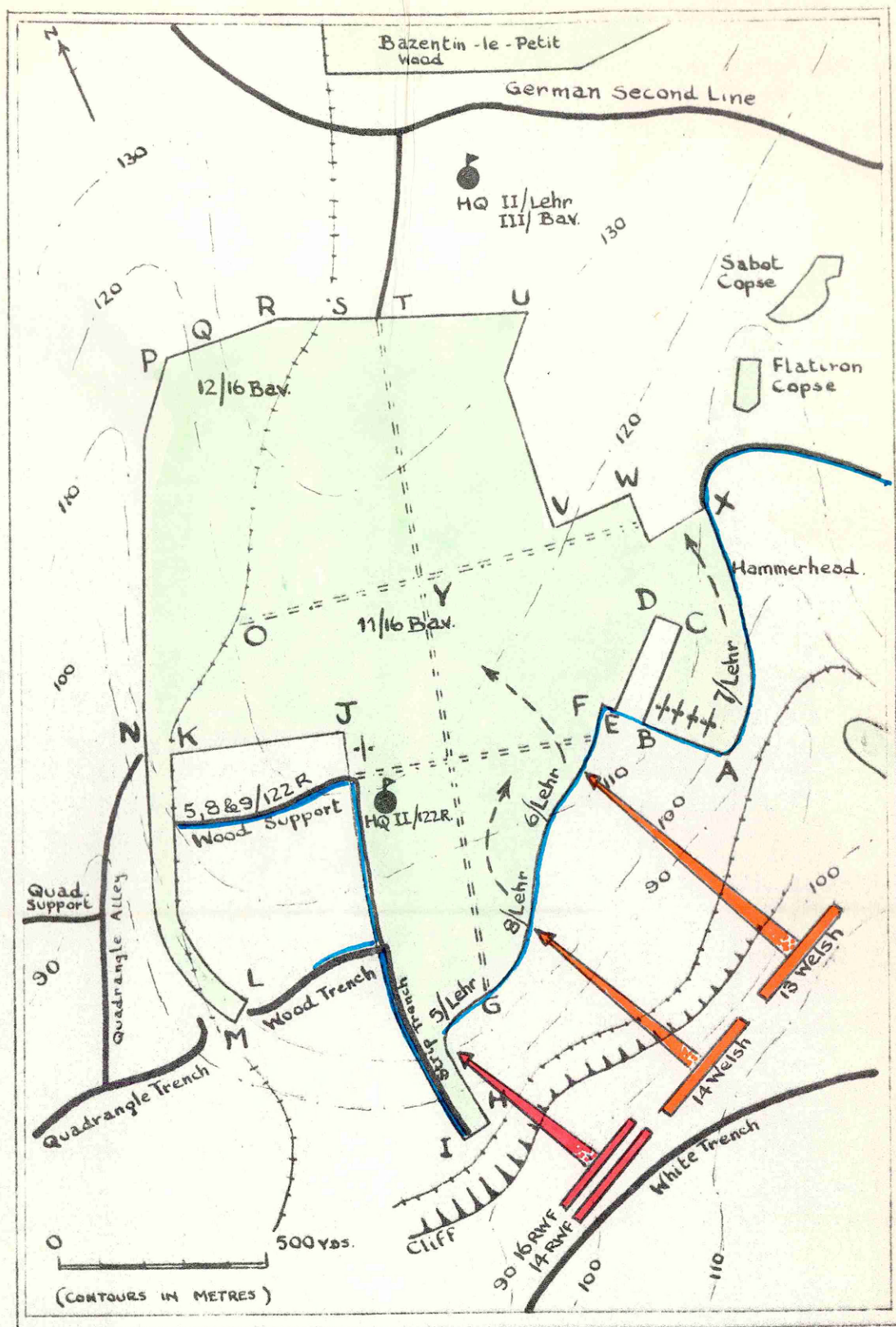
cross ridge and west of 'Hammerhead' where it would remain until 6.15 am giving the infantry time to consolidate their positions. The barrage was then to lift slowly back again, this time coming to rest just north of the second ridge. At 7.15 am it was to lift slowly to the northern edge of the wood, and one hour after that to the German second line.⁸ The targets allocated to the various artillery groups and batteries are shown in the diagram at Annex E which has been reconstructed from operational orders issued by Commander Royal Artillery, 7th Division.

10th July

The disposition of British and German forces in and around Mametz Wood in the early hours of 10th July is shown in Map 10. To the right of the 38th (Welsh) Division the 3rd Division (XIII Corps) had taken over from 18th Division in Caterpillar Wood. 3rd Division was however busy with preparations for the forthcoming attack on Bazentin Ridge and played no active part in the fighting for the next few days. The 38th (Welsh) Division retained a toe hold in Caterpillar wood to command the Eastern Edge of Mametz Wood. On the left, as we have seen, 17th (Northern) Division was struggling to capture Quadrangle Support trench. Its role during the coming day was to support the left flank of the 38th Division until relieved in the evening by the 21st Division. Further to the left, the 23rd Division (III Corps) was to continue its attempts to capture Contalmaison.

As on 7th July, the southern edge of Mametz Wood was held by the 2nd Battalion (Companies 5, 6, 7 and 8) of the Lehr Infantry Regiment (3rd Guards Division). Behind it were units from other divisions including part of the 3rd Battalion, 16th Bavarian Regiment and of the 2nd Battalion, 184th Regiment. Wood Trench and Wood Support were held by the 3rd Battalion of the 122nd (Wurttemberg) Reserve Regiment (183rd Reserve Infantry Division) which had relieved the 163rd Regiment a few days before. Other battalions of the 122nd regiment held Quadrangle Support, the Kaisergraben and Contalmaison village.

East of the wood, the 3rd Battalion of the Lehr Regiment continued to hold the German second line from Bazentin-le-Petit wood to Bazentin-



MAP 11. MAMETZ WOOD. 10TH JULY. 4.15 a.m.

KEY:

... 113 Bde.

... 114 Bde.

÷ German m. gun

← --- Direction of German Withdrawal

le-Grand and also the positions forward of this around Flatiron and Sabot copses. North West of the wood, the second line was occupied by a mixed force of the 1st Battalion Lehr Regiment and the Fusilier Battalion of the 9th Grenadier Guards, both well under strength and badly shaken as a result of earlier fighting in defence of Contalmaison.⁹

With such a mixture of units, and with both British and German battalions at less than full strength, it is impossible accurately to estimate the relative strength of the two sides. One German source¹⁰ puts the ratio of battalions on this part of the front at four to one in favour of the British - three Divisions (23rd, 17th and 38th) of twelve battalions each against three German Regiments (183rd, which was west of Contalmaison, 122nd Reserve and Lehr) of three battalions each, but this ignores the other German units mentioned above and thus overstates the British advantage. It seems probable however that the British infantry outnumbered the German by at least three to one, but the Germans of course had the advantage of being on the defensive in well-prepared positions and their troops were in general much more highly trained and experienced in battle. Furthermore, unlike the British, the Germans tended to keep their divisions in one place for long periods so that they knew the ground well.¹¹

The morning of 10th July was fair and bracing. By 3 am the leading battalions of the 38th Division were in position between White Trench and the brow of the cliff and there was nothing to do but wait. They were to attack in parallel lines or 'waves' as they had practised in manoeuvres, with bayonets fixed and rifles held in the high port position, 4 paces between each man, 100 yards between each line, the 16th RWF leading for the 113th Brigade with 14th RWF close behind, and the 13th and 14th Welsh leading on the 114th Brigade front (see Map 6)¹². David Jones, then a private soldier with the 15th RWF in Queen's Nullah, has captured the feeling of tension among the waiting infantry:

Racked out to another turn of the screw
the acceleration heightens:
the sensibility of these instruments to register,
fails:
needle dithers disorientate.

The responsive mercury plays laggard to such fevers - you simply can't take any more in.

And the surfeit of fear steadies to dumb incognition,
so that

when they give the order to move upward to align with 'A',
hugged already just under the lip of the activity
inches below where his traversing machine-guns

perforate to powder white -

White creatures of chalk pounded

and the world crumbled away

and get ready to advance

you have not capacity for added fear.....¹³

On the left, the 16 RWF sang hymns in Welsh and Col. Carden addressed his men with religious fervour. 'Boys, make your peace with God! We are going to take that position and some of us won't come back. But we are going to take it'.¹⁴ At 3.30 am the artillery opened up as planned and 20 minutes later a smoke screen, laid just south of Strip Trench, drifted effectively North Eastward. As zero hour approached, the two leading battalions of the 114th Brigade, having the greater distance to travel, moved off early, at 4.09 am, so as to be near the wood when the artillery lifted off the southern edge. This seems to have taken the 16th RWF by surprise and caused a moment of confusion. Colonel Carden had gone over to the 114th Brigade for consultation and was still away when the 13th and 14th Welsh had moved off. His second in command, Major McLellan, assumed that he had become a casualty and gave the word to advance:

On reaching the brow of the hill, the leading lines saw the 114th Brigade, or parts of it, retiring and they too wavered. Some went forward but almost all returned to their previous positions. This was not a headlong flight but was done slowly and was largely owing to someone who cannot be traced raising a shout of 'Retire'.

Almost immediately after this, Col. Carden returned and the advance began again. Captain Westbrooke and Lt. Venables had shown great coolness in pulling their men together, and this time the movement was carried out in good order. All the officers state that the advance down the hill-side under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire was executed with perfect steadiness.¹⁵

The delay however cost the battalion the protection of the artillery, and enemy fire from the edge of the wood and from Quadrangle Alley and Wood Trench soon broke up the formation. Carden, a conspicuous figure with his stick held high, was wounded and fell, but he struggled on to the edge of the wood where he was killed.¹⁶ The two companies of the 14th Battalion RWF following close behind likewise ran into heavy fire when about 200 yards from the wood. Their Commanding Officer,

Major Gwyther was badly wounded and Captain Glynn Jones gave the order to reform in a cutting at the bottom of the cliff. Later, he described the descent down the cliff as he saw it from his position in the third wave:

Machine guns and rifles began to rattle, and there was a general state of pandemonium, little of which I can remember except that I myself was moving down the slope at a rapid rate, with bullet-holes in my pocket and yelling a certain amount. I noticed also that there was no appearance whatsoever of waves about the movement at this time, and that the men in advance of us were thoroughly demoralised. Out of the most terrible 'mix-up' I have ever seen I collected all the men I could see and ordered them into the cutting. There appeared to be no one ahead of us, no one following us, and by this time it was broad daylight and the ridge behind us was being subjected to a terrible artillery and machine-gun fire.

I well remember thinking 'Here comes the last stand of the old Caernarvon and Angleseys' as I ordered the men to get ready and posted a Lewis gun on each of my flanks..... Meanwhile, men were crawling in from shell-holes to our front, with reports of nothing less than a terrible massacre, and the names of most of our officers and NCOs lying dead in front.¹⁷

On the far right, the Lehr regiment had placed a machine-gun company skillfully on the underside of the Hammerhead (see Map 11) and its fire caught the leading waves of the 13th Welsh (2nd Rhondda) in the flank as they approached the wood. Sgt. Price described the scene:

We attacked on a two company frontage, A and B Company 13th Welsh leading, followed by C and D. I was in A Company, No 2 platoon.

We were loaded up with 4 Mills bombs each in our pockets and 4 bandoliers of ammunition across our shoulders, which was quite heavy and which made the approach to the wood quite a physical task.

As the barrage started we moved off in quite an orderly fashion The tension and noise cannot be described, what with the traction of shells through the air and the noise of explosions all round us, it was almost impossible to give verbal orders and we had to rely on hand signals for directing any move.

Men were falling in all directions due to intense machine-gun fire coming against us. How we got to the wood I do not know; but we got there and entered it for a short distance before the Germans came at us - head on - and there was quite a lot of action before we were forced to retreat back into the field again, where we got into shell holes or any other form of cover we could get. The Germans followed us to the edge of the wood but as our lines were then able to fire on them they quickly returned to the protection of the tree stumps.¹⁸

As C & D Companies came forward, a second attempt was made to enter the wood. This was also repulsed but a third attempt was more successful and the 13th Welsh pushed on into the wood.

In the centre, the Swansea battalion (14th Welsh) had the advantage of being protected on the flanks from enfilade fire. The battalion crossed the open ground in perfect formation and arrived at the edge of the wood just as the barrage was lifting back. The artillery tactics had worked well here and there were few casualties amongst the first waves of infantry. The rear waves were not so fortunate however and several officers fell, including the second in command and three Company commanders. Once in the wood the battalion found it difficult to make progress. The undergrowth was thick and the central ride almost indistinguishable. 'Many of the shells, probably from both sides, hit the trees above us, detonated and caused us more casualties', Sgt. Lyons of D Company, wrote long afterwards. 'Progress through the wood was slow due mainly to German machine gun fire but also to the density of the undergrowth in the wood. This also impeded visibility. It was difficult to maintain our sense of direction but I was helped in this by being able to tell the difference between the sound of our guns and the Germans'.¹⁹

On the left, the 16th RWF also entered the wood, the bombers successfully pushing up Strip Trench in spite of severe casualties. The undergrowth was not so thick in this part of the wood but British shells had blown trees across the trench and at one point water was pouring in from a nearby pond. One of the bombers, Private Griffith Jones remembers moving up through the mud:

I came up against a foot-thick tree trunk. I decided not to go underneath as the mud would be up to my neck so I lifted one leg over it...../I saw/..... A German behind a bush about 25 yards away levelling his rifle towards me. I threw myself back/and/..... was hit by a bullet in the leg. Eventually I got up in the mud and felt burning pain and saw the mud-covered putties red with blood. I took the bayonet off my rifle and using the rifle as a crutch I trudged along back down the trench. When I came to the open I fell down exhausted and was taken away by stretcher bearer.²⁰

The 16th RWF was soon joined by the 15th RWF (London Welsh), whom Brig-Gen Price-Davies had committed to the attack almost from the outset, and later by two companies of the 13th RWF - the last of the 113th Brigade's four battalions. The Germans were now surrendering

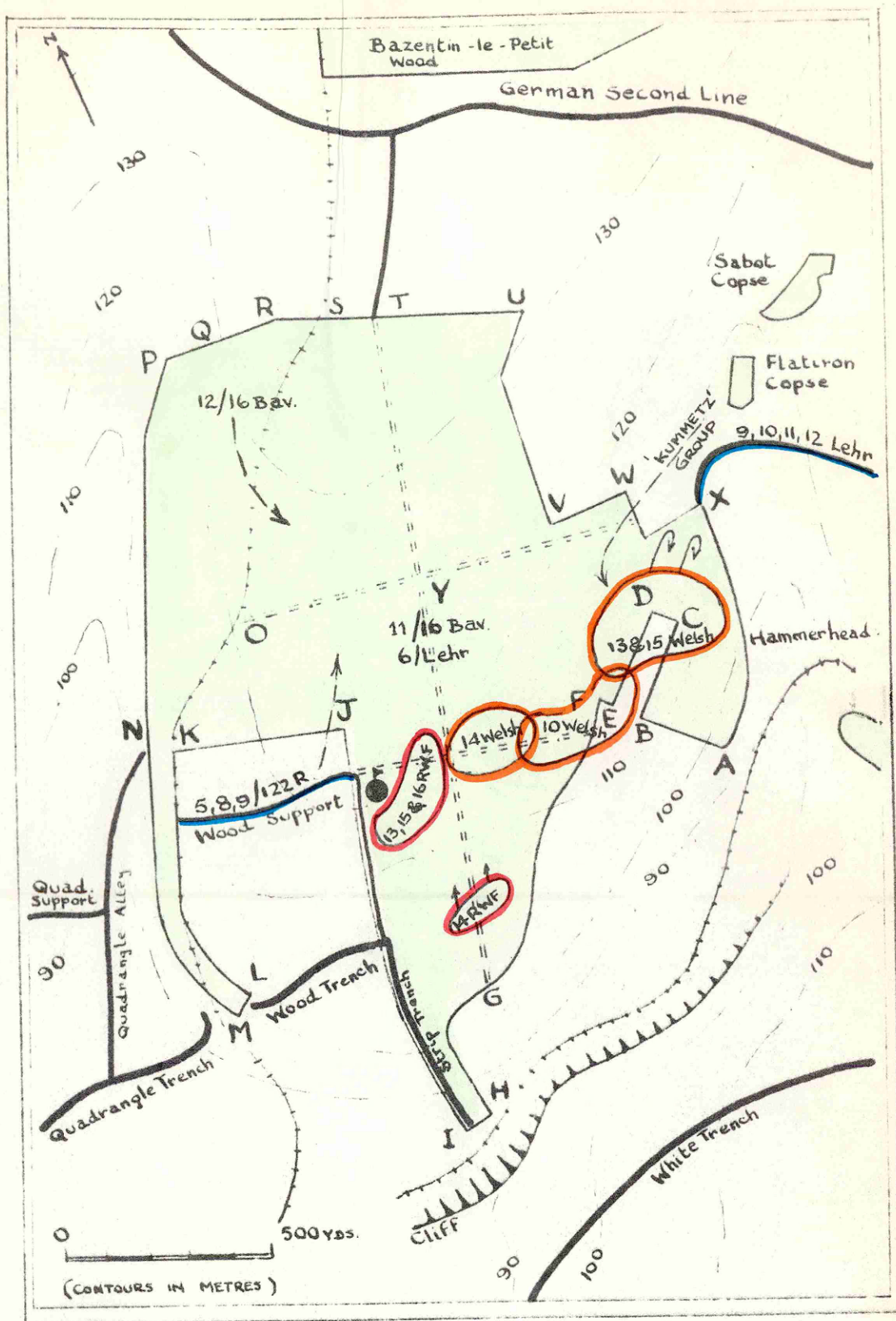
in large numbers and the three RWF battalions, pushing out patrols in all directions, were able to move towards the first cross-ride, joining up en route with the 6th Dorsets (17th Division) in Wood Trench.

At about this time, Capt. Glynn Jones, with the remnants of the 14th RWF still gathered in the cutting below the embankment saw about 40 German soldiers leaving the wood with their hands up:

Suspecting a trick, I ordered my men to cover them but allowed them to approach us. When they got about half-way I went out to meet them, accompanied by a Sergeant, and sent them back to headquarters. As this appeared to point to the wood being unoccupied, I sent a small patrol to examine it; and then we all moved forward. Crossing the trench on the fringe of it, we entered the wood at the entrance of the main ride, and with two patrols in front advanced up the rise in file, as the undergrowth was very thick.²¹

Meanwhile, on the 114th Brigade front, the 13th and 14th Welsh, now reinforced by 10th Welsh (1st Rhondda), also made progress towards the first cross ride which they reached, and then passed at about 5 am while the barrage was still falling on it. 'We suffered many casualties from our own shell fire', the 13th Welsh Battalion diary records, 'Major Bond being killed. When it was realised it was our own barrage we were in and not that of the Hun, the order to withdraw was given and the Battalion withdrew for a time. During the interval we fell in with the 10th Welsh coming up to re-inforce and got in touch with the 14th Welsh. Colonel Hayes (14th Welsh) ordered the Battalion to dig in along the ride at E' (see map II). Colonel Hayes had earlier sent a message to Brigade headquarters asking for the artillery to be lifted right back to the German second line. Brig-Gen Marden relayed the message to the artillery but the request was refused. The artillery stuck to its programme and Col. Hayes was told to strengthen his position and to be ready to advance at the appointed hour. According to the Official History, this 'afforded the enemy such a respite that he thought better of evacuating the wood completely', orders to this effect having been written at 4.15 am by the local German commander.²²

In spite of this however the first stage of the attack had been quite successful. Hammerhead on the right and Wood Support trench on the



MAP 12 MAMETZ WOOD 10TH JULY 9 a.m.

KEY

- 113 Bde.
- 114 Bde.

Approx. positions

left were still in German hands, but otherwise the first objective had been captured well ahead of timetable, though at considerable cost. Even at this early stage, seven battalions had been committed, five of which had lost their commanders killed or badly wounded - Lt. Col. Ricketts of the 10th Welsh having been hit several times while bringing his battalion forward in support. Casualties had also been high among the other officers making it difficult to exercise control over the thousands of men already in the wood. The British High Command was however well content, Haig in particular expressing his satisfaction with morning reports that two Brigades had succeeded in entering the wood.²³

If the fighting so far in Mametz Wood had been hectic and confused on the British side, it was no less so for the Germans. At 4.15 am, as the 38th Division penetrated the Southern edge of the wood, the 5th Company of the Lehr Regiment became trapped between the 16th RWF pushing up Strip Trench and the 14th Welsh in the centre. Some of the guardsmen, as we have seen, left the wood and surrendered to Capt. Glynn Jones's group at the foot of the cliff, but others held their ground until overrun. The 7th and 8th Companies however, under Lt. Pfeiffer worked their way skilfully back towards the northern edge of Hammerhead to join up with the 3rd Battalion at Flatiron Copse. The machine-gun company at the SE corner of the wood also withdrew successfully, and although two guns were lost, another three kept up a deadly fire as they moved from shell hole to shell hole back towards the second line. In the centre, remnants of the 6th Company retreated towards the middle of the wood where they joined up with two platoons of the 16th Bavarian Infantry Regiment and held on until the afternoon, when they too were forced back towards the second line.²⁴

At 6.15 am the British artillery began its ponderous programme of slow lifts to the second cross-ride, the infantry following closely behind wherever possible. The Royal Welsh Fusiliers on the left however met strong opposition at Wood Support Trench and at the corner of the wood - point J on Map 7 - where the 2nd Battalion of the German 122nd Infantry Regiment had its headquarters in a well-defended redout. Lt. Col. Flower was therefore sent forward with the last two companies of the 13th RWF 'to find out the exact situation and reorganise the Brigade'.²⁵ Shortly afterwards Brig-Gen Price-Davies

received permission from Divisional HQ to enter the wood and together with Colonel Gosset of the Fourth Army staff he made his way up Strip Trench, where he was distressed to see a party of men 'running back in panic'. David Jones, who also witnessed this incident, puts it down to lack of supervision. 'Something must have developed, if not into a panic, at least into a disorderly falling back - simply because of not having precise directions.'²⁶

Order was however soon restored and the two fresh companies of the 13th RWF began to advance through the troops in front of them, one company being given the task of holding the first cross-ride, the other of pushing on ahead into the wood. When they reached the cross-ride however, both companies became caught up in the confused fighting amongst the tangled trees and little further progress was made that morning.

Over at Flatiron Copse things were a little easier for the Germans, although the 3rd Battalion of the Lehr Regiment had suffered heavy losses during the Artillery bombardment of this area. However, as no infantry attack followed, the Regimental commander, Lt. Col. Kümme urged the Battalion to send help to the 2nd Battalion in Mametz Wood. Major von Kriegsheim, the battalion commander, sent off one platoon each from the 9th, 10th and 12th Companies and to these were added a platoon of the 5th Company/184th Infantry Regiment. This group, under Lt. Kümme reached the eastern edge of the wood at about 9 am, joined up with the 7th and 8th Companies, and created havoc among British troops in Hammerhead. Later on, Major von Kriegsheim sent another platoon to join this force but only under pressure from his superiors, and even then with great reluctance. He had still not ruled out the possibility that the British might launch a flanking attack east of the wood and he saw little sense in weakening the second line at this point in order to defend a wood the only strategic importance of which was in defence of that very line.

Meanwhile, since on the right the 13th Welsh was failing to make progress in the Hammerhead the last of the 114th Brigade's four battalions - the Carmarthenshires (15th Welsh) - was sent in to help. Together, the 13th and 15th Welsh pushed through the Hammerhead almost to point X (see Map 7) but were then driven back by Lt. Kümme's group which had managed to get behind two companies of the 15th Welsh and ambush two platoons. Machine-gun and rifle



PLATE 2. Mametz Wood July 1916, showing undergrowth.



PLATE 3. German observation post in Mametz Wood.

fire caught the Welshmen in the rear and of the two platoons (about 100 men) only 4 men found their way back to the battalion. The 15th Welsh fell back on the line DE, with its left in touch with other battalions on the first cross-ride.²⁷ Thus by mid-morning the British line in the wood ran roughly from point J on the left, through F to D and thence in a south-easterly direction to the edge of the wood (see Map 7).

Shortly after 9 am, at the request of 38th Division headquarters, the Heavy Artillery had fired for 15 minutes on the wood north of the second ride and on the German 2nd line. But this did not stop German reinforcements from arriving, and large parties of them were seen entering the wood from the north at about 9.35 am.²⁸ At 10.30, Brig-Gen Marden put Lt. Col. Hayes (14th Welsh) in charge of all forces east of the central ride and ordered him to advance to the second cross-ride. This he did successfully in the centre, pushing forward about 200 yards before being held up for lack of support on the right. As the wood had now swallowed up all his troops, and little progress was being made, Brig-Gen Marden sought permission to enter the wood to see the position for himself and to reorganise. Gen. Watts however refused to let him go and instead sent in from the 115th Brigade the two battalions which had suffered least on 7th July: the 17th RWF going to the assistance of the 113rd Brigade on the left, and the 10th SWB (1st Gwent) to the 114th Brigade on the right. To ease congestion on the 113th Brigade front, the 15th and the 16th RWF were withdrawn temporarily from the wood. The fresh troops arrived at about 2.40 pm and gave new impetus to the attack. After another bombardment of the northern part of the wood, the two battalions began to push forward, the 17th RWF by-passing the end of Wood Support trench and the German strong-point nearby. To its left, the 13th RWF bombed down Wood Support trench to meet troops of the 17th Division approaching from the other end. On the right the 10th SWB also made good progress, pushing forward to the line YV (map 7) with some patrols penetrating almost to the north-eastern corner of the wood. Eventually however the battalion was brought to a halt by machine-gun fire from the northern edge of the Hammerhead.

At 3 pm, Brig-Gen Marden was allowed to enter the wood where he conferred with Brig-Gen Price-Davies and Lt. Col. Rhys Pryce, the

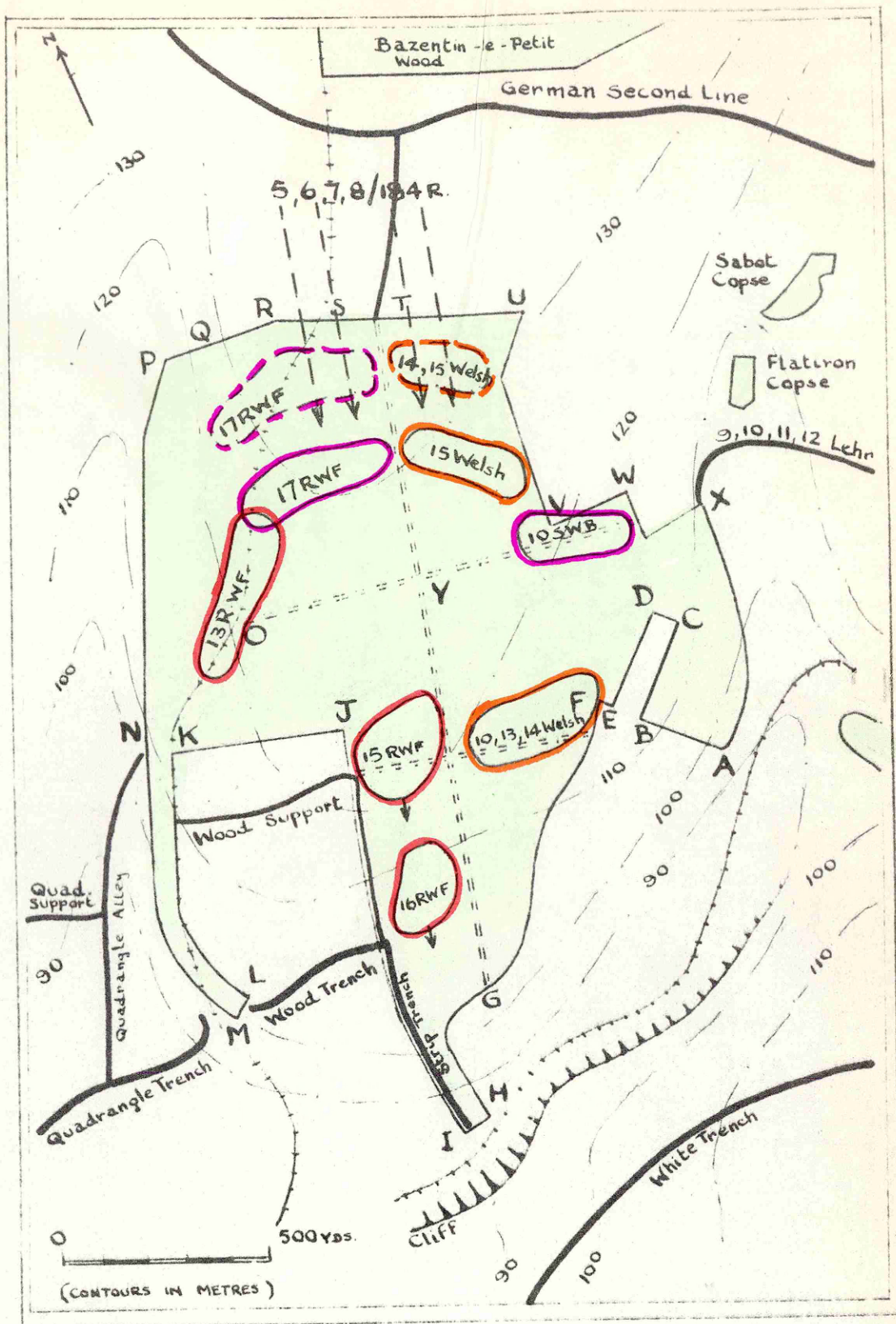
GS01 38th Division, who had come forward with the reserves.

Between them, they decided to straighten out the line, and, at 4.30 pm, to make a concerted sweep through the wood. The 17th RWF supported by the 14th and 15th Welsh made considerable progress against little opposition on the ground although German snipers in the trees inflicted a good many casualties.

By 6.30 pm the battalion had reached to within 30 or 40 yards of the northern edge of the wood. The 10th SWB, which had been tasked with capturing Hammerhead, pushed between Lt. Kummetz's group and other German forces in the wood. Major von Kriegsheim thereupon ordered the withdrawal of Kummetz's group leaving Hammerhead in the hands of the 10th SWB. On the far left, however, the 13th RWF which had to spread out westward to cover the wider part of the wood, fell behind and it was some time before it caught up with the other battalions. With the front now close to the German second line, the troops came under very heavy machine-gun fire and were withdrawn to a line 200 or 300 yards from the northern edge of the wood, with the left flank pulled back along the railway line (map 8). Here they dug in for the night. By now the troops were tired and jumpy, as well as being badly in need of water. There was a great deal of wild firing during the night and some men panicked down the central ridge when the Germans threatened a counter attack. Eventually order was restored and the exhausted men fell asleep.

During the evening the German High command, having completely underestimated the number of British troops in the wood and the extent to which they had penetrated, had ordered the wood to be held at all costs and at 7 pm sent in the 2nd battalion of the 184th Infantry Regiment to recapture it, assisted by a company of Pioneers hastily converted to fighting troops. Together, the two units pushed through the wood from the north until they met the British troops dug in on a line 200 yards from the edge of the wood. Realising the strength of the opposition, they too dug themselves in.

Outside the wood, the 17th Division finally captured Quadrangle Support Trench, but not before Contalmaison had fallen to the 23rd Division at about 5.30 pm. Attempts earlier in the day to capture the trench by bombing up Pearl Alley and Quadrangle Alley



MAP 13 MAMETZ WOOD 10TH JULY 7-9 p.m.

KEY:

7pm

9pm



113 Bde
114 Bde
115 Bde

had ended in disaster. Lt Kostlin, in command of a company of 122nd Infantry Reserve Regiment holding Quadrangle Support Trench at the time, has described how in one such attack the 7th East Yorks found Quadrangle Alley blocked 20 yards short of the junction and attempted to cross in the open to Quadrangle Support:

My sentries.... noticed steel helmets moving about above ground-level at the sap-head [in Quadrangle Alley] and kept it under careful watch. Each time the men began to climb up out of the sap-head and run forward at us with bombs, the sentries gave the alarm, and we were able to greet them with heavy fire at point-blank range. Then others crowded at the sap-head and repeated the effort, but with equal failure and by midday a heap of British dead and wounded lay about the sap-head.

After dark however, with Contalmaison taken and the 38th Division well advanced in Mametz Wood, Lt. Kostlin and his men, threatened on three sides, made good their escape to the rear:

The ground behind our trench was being continually shelled, but about midnight the fire ceased and we decided to rush for it. The plan worked successfully, and although a number of men were wounded by shells and stray bullets we succeeded, a total of 5 officers and 120 men, in reaching the barbed wire entanglements in front of the second line position at 1.30 am. Here we were greeted by a machine gun which suddenly opened from the trench, but throwing ourselves on the ground and shouting we soon convinced the gunner of his error and luckily with no cost to ourselves.²⁹

Thus as 10th July drew to a close, and 17th Division handed its part of the front back to 21st Division, the British were established in Contalmaison; in most of Mametz Wood; and in the trenches in between. Everything seemed set for the advance on the German second line.

'Another day of heavy fighting', Rawlinson wrote in his diary. 'The 38th Division succeeded in capturing practically the whole of Mametz Wood and the III Corps also took Contalmaison. In these circumstances I have decided to begin the bombardment of their second line tomorrow and to attack it on the 13th at dawn, weather permitting'.³⁰ Haig was also well satisfied as he toured Army and Corps Headquarters that evening. 'I saw Gen. Horne, commanding XV Corps at Heilly' he wrote. 'He reported that Gen. Watts (Comdg 7th Division) had temporarily taken command of the 38th Welsh Division and had nearly got the whole of Mametz Wood. What an effect on the division has a good commander!' ³¹

July 11

At 5 am on 11th July, Brig-Gen Evans (115th Brigade) took over command of the troops in Mametz Wood. He established his Brigade Headquarters in a shell-torn clearing at the cross-roads on the first cross-ride and brought up the 16th Welsh (Cardiff City) battalion and two companies of the 11th SWB to relieve units of the 113th and 114th Brigades. The only other troops at his disposal - the remaining companies of the 11th SWB, the 115th MG Company and the 115th Trench mortar Battery continued to hold the Western end of Caterpillar Wood. When he arrived in Mametz Wood, Brig-Gen Evans was surprised to find the front line still a long way from the Northern edge, for he had been under the impression that the wood had been more or less completely taken and that his task was to defend it against possible counter-attack, rather than to carry out an attack himself.³²

When he inspected the line, Brig-Gen Evans found the battalions of the 113th and 114th Brigades, and the two battalions of his own Brigade which had gone into action the previous day, scattered and disorganised, with some units weak in numbers and very tired. He therefore straightened the line, sorted out the battalions, and as far as possible replaced tired men with fresh. The 13th Welsh and 14th Welsh, in particular, which had led the attack and been in action continuously for more than 24 hours were withdrawn completely from the wood.³³ The new dispositions were: on the left, the Cardiff City Battalion (16th Welsh) occupied the line along the railway as far south as point O, with the 17 RWF on the right holding the line to the central ride. The 11th South Wales Borderers held the line east of the central ride with the 10th South Wales Borderers on their right occupying the northern part of Hammershead. The 16th RWF which had had a period of rest outside the wood was brought back to secure the railway line between points O and K (see map 14).³⁴

While this reorganisation was in progress, the Brigade-Major of the 115th Brigade was hit by shrapnel and Brig-Gen Evans sent for Capt. Griffith to join him in the wood. A few weeks previously, Capt. Griffith had been a Company officer in the 15 RWF: now without staff training, he was to become a Brigade-Major at the height of a battle:

I passed through two barrages before I reached the wood, one aimed at the body, and the other at the mind. The enemy was shelling the approach from the South with some determination, but I was fortunate enough to escape injury and to pass to an ordeal ever greater. Men of my old battalion were lying dead on the ground in great profusion. They wore a yellow badge on their sleeves, and without this distinguishing mark, it would have been impossible to recognise the remains of many of them.

My first acquaintance with the stubborn nature of the undergrowth came when I attempted to leave the main ride to escape a heavy shelling. I could not push a way through it, and I had to return to the ride. Years of neglect had turned the wood into a formidable barrier, a mile deep. Heavy shelling of the Southern end had beaten down some of the young growth, but it had also thrown trees and large branches into a barricade. Equipment, ammunition, rolls of barbed wire, tins of food, gas-helmets and rifles were lying about everywhere. There were more corpses than men, but there were worse sights than corpses. Limbs and mutilated trunks, here and there a detached head, forming splashes of red against the green leaves, and, as in advertisement of the horror of our way of life and death, and of our crucifixion of youth, one tree held in its branches a leg, with its torn flesh hanging down over a spray of leaf.

I reached a cross-ride in the Wood where four lanes broadened into a confused patch of destruction. Fallen trees, shell holes, a hurriedly dug trench beginning and ending in an uncertain manner, abandoned rifles, broken branches with their sagging leaves, an unopened box of ammunition, sandbags half-filled with bombs, a derelict machine-gun propping up the head of an immobile figure in uniform, with a belt of ammunition drooping from the breech into a pile of red-stained earth
.....³⁵

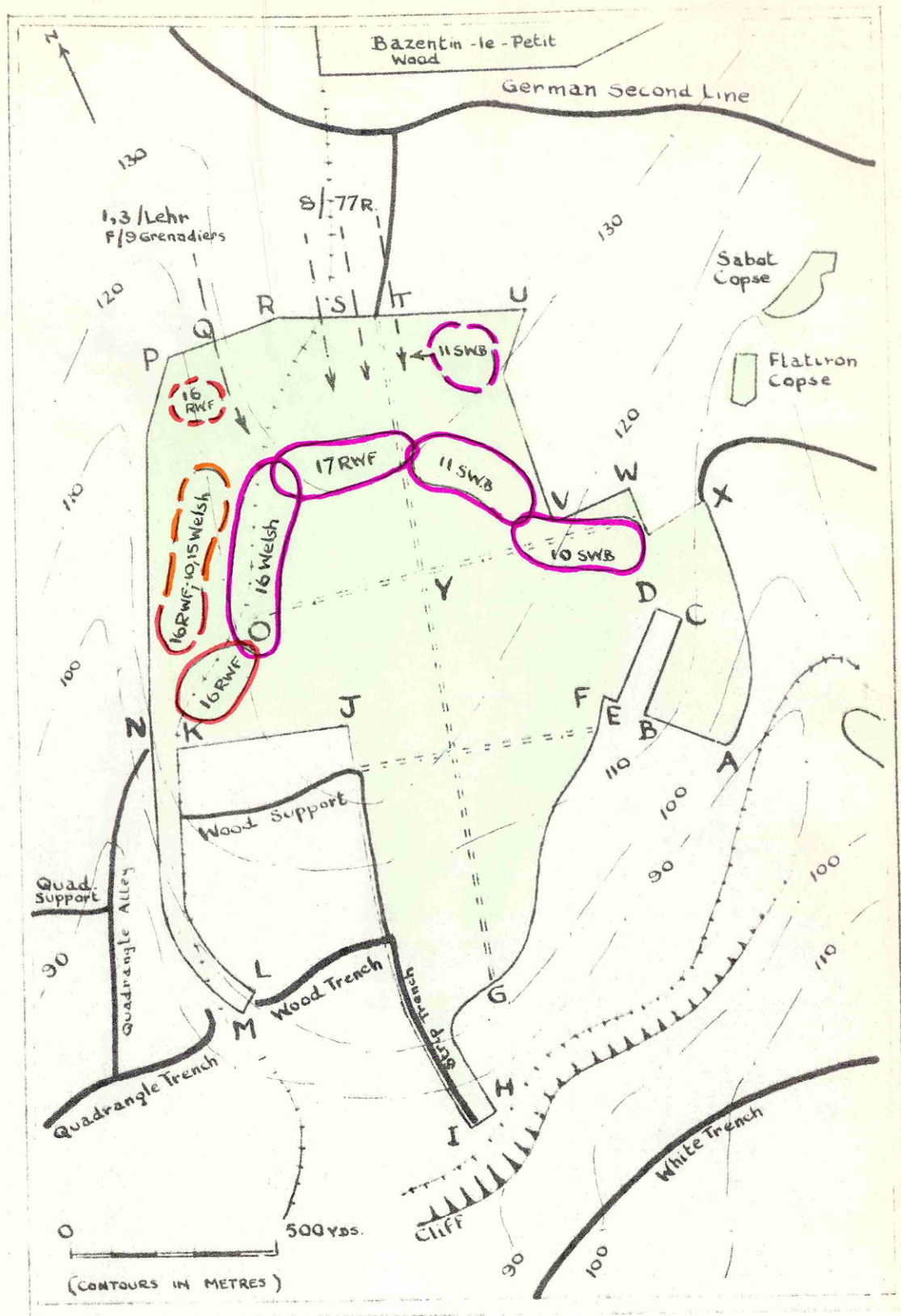
Here he found the Brigade Commander who explained that the Battalions were straightening themselves out and strengthening their positions before making probes and reconnaissances to establish whether or not the enemy was holding the Northern end of the wood in strength. Major-General Watts however at Divisional HQ more than 6 miles away had no such doubts. He sent a message at 11 am to say that the German trenches in front of Bazentin were being shelled and that 'it was quite impossible that he had any strong force in MANETZ WOOD'. He considered that an attack with only a few men 'advancing with determination' was bound to succeed and he ordered the 115th Brigade to attack and occupy the Northern and Western edges of the Wood 'at the earliest moment', as the Corps Commander had strongly impressed upon him the importance of clearing the Wood without delay.³⁶ While Brigadier Evans was considering this order Lt. Col. Gossett of the Fourth Army staff arrived and himself gave orders for the attack to be carried out. 'The Brigadier listened to him with the patience

of an older man coldly assessing the enthusiasm of youth' wrote Griffith. 'When the Staff Officer had finished, the General spoke. "I've just had orders from the Division to attack and clear the rest of the Wood, and to do it at once. The defence is incomplete, the units are disorganised, and I did not propose to attack until we were in a better position. My patrols report that the Northern edge is strongly held. I haven't a fresh battalion, and no one can say what is the strength of any unit..... My intention is to take the remainder of the Wood by surprise, with the bayonet if possible; no artillery bombardment to tell him that we are coming. I want a bombardment of the main German second line when we have taken our objective, to break up any counter-attack."',³⁷

When the Staff Officer had gone, orders were issued to the three central Battalions to prepare for an attack Northward at 3 pm, the 16th Welsh working up the railway track, the 17 RWF up the central ride, and the 11th SWB along the Eastern edge of the wood. Patrols had suggested that the Wood was fairly clear in front of the 16th Welsh but that the 17 RWF and 11 SWB could expect to run into strong opposition. Several German machine-guns were reported to be positioned near the centre of the Northern edge of the Wood.







At a quarter to three, these plans were upset by a heavy barrage put down on the Northern end of the Wood by British artillery. As all telephone wires had been cut, it was impossible to stop it although three runners were promptly sent off by different routes in an attempt to get a message through.³⁸ At 3.30 pm, the barrage lifted - not because the runners had arrived with their messages but because this was the programme planned by General Watts, and communicated to the Commander, Royal Artillery, 7th Division, though not, it would seem, to Brig-Gen Evans.³⁹

Although the battalions had postponed their attack, they still suffered severely from the shell-fire as the 18 pounders of the artillery was now firing at the limit of their range and shells were falling short.⁴⁰ When the bombardment stopped the Battalions moved forward. The 11th SWB on the right reached the North-East corner of the wood by 5.40 pm. in spite of stubborn resistance by the Germans, who again made good use of defensive machine-gun fire. The 16th Welsh



KEY:

8am; 11 pm. 6-8 pm



 113 Bde,


 114 Bde,


 115 Bde

and 17th RWF however met even stronger resistance and were forced back to their original positions. Two companies of the 10th SWB and two of the 10th Welsh Regiment were brought forward to help and the 16th Welsh and 17th RWF were ordered to renew their attack to relieve pressure on the right. The 11th SWB held on to their advanced position and at 8 pm even tried to work Westward along the Northern edge of the wood only to find that the Germans had been strongly reinforced.

The 16th Welsh and 17th RWF were however again thrown back leaving the 11th SWB in a precarious position. Brig-Gen Evans with no other troops immediately at his disposal except a hundred or so Pioneers, realised that the 11th SWB were now dangerously exposed and, although desperately anxious to hold the North-East corner, he told the Commanding Officer of the 11th SWB (Lt. Col. Gaussen) to use his discretion and, if necessary, withdraw to his old position. This he did, and by 9.20 pm all the troops on the right were back where they had started.⁴¹

Meanwhile, over on the far left, the 16th RWF now joined by the 10th and 15th Welsh on the lower part of the railway (O - K) had managed to gain the Western edge of the Wood and dig in. One platoon bombed its way northward to come into line with the other battalions, 300 yards from the Northern edge and at one point managed to penetrate almost to the North-West corner. At 11 pm however they came under heavy Artillery and mortar fire and were compelled to withdraw East of the railway. Towards midnight, the German opened up with rifle and machine-gun fire from the Northern edge of the Wood but the tired British troops did not respond. Throughout the night, German artillery systematically bombarded the wood the 5.9" and 8" shells and inflicted many casualties.⁴²

On the German side, there was complete determination to hold the 2nd line behind Mametz Wood at all costs and to retain the Northern strip of the wood as a buffer. The remnants of the 1st Battalion Lehr Regiment, and of the Fusilier Battalion of the 9th Grenadier Regiment holding the line north-west of Mametz Wood were ordered to push forward patrols into the Wood, to establish the true strength and position of the British troops. The patrols were also to bring

back news of other German units in the Wood and, if possible, clear the patrolled area of British troops - an almost impossible task. It proved to be quite beyond them as heavy artillery fire and difficult conditions underfoot hindered their progress. On both sides of the light railway, they encountered units of the 184th Infantry Regiment in position but found it difficult to estimate their strength. To the West, but still inside the Wood they met units of the 16th Bavarian Infantry Regiment and sharpshooters from the 9th Grenadiers. They also had difficulty in establishing the extent of British occupation of the Wood but estimated, correctly, that they were within 150-200 metres of the Northern edge. The patrols failed to make contact with the other Battalions of the Lehr Regiment but in the afternoon came across a company of the 77th Reserve Infantry Regiment (2nd Guards Reserve Division) which had been sent forward 'to clear Mametz Wood'. The patrols seem to have regarded this as a futile attempt, being of the opinion that it would need a large force of fresh troops to succeed.⁴³ Nevertheless, this unit, together with the 2nd Battalion of the 184th Infantry Regiment and remnants of the 122nd Reserve Infantry Regiment, helped frustrate the Welsh attack in the centre of the wood from 4 pm onwards.⁴⁴

Although the German patrols failed to find the 2nd Battalion of the Lehr Regiment in the wood, some companies of the battalion were in fact still there, but weak in numbers, in spite of having received a hundred new recruits during the night. The previous day, they had lost heavily: one officer killed, two taken prisoner; 82 Warrant Officers, NCOs and guardsmen killed, 61 wounded and 254 missing. The now depleted units came under the command of an officer of the 77th Regiment and continued their stubborn defence of the wood until 8 pm by which time it was clear that the Wood could no longer be held and a retreat to the second line was ordered. The evacuation began as darkness fell and only a few patrols were left inside the Wood.⁴⁵

Just before dawn on 12th July, the four battalions of the 62nd Infantry Brigade (21st Division) moved up to relieve the exhausted units of the 38th Division in the Wood. This was not before time. The conditions of the Welshmen had been cause for common concern at

Corps Headquarters as early as 8 am on the previous morning as the record of a telephone conversation between General Watts and the Corps Commander shows:

8 am July 11th.

The situation in MAMETZ WOOD was being investigated with a view to clearing it up and establishing a line on the northern edge of the Wood. General Watts was of the opinion that if the 38th Division were not in a condition to do so, he had better put one of the battalions of the 7th Division in to do the job. Corps Commander concurred but impressed upon General Watts the desirability of not using the battalion of the 7th Division if it were possible to avoid doing so. Corps Commander would direct GOC 21st Division to arrange with General Watts for the relief of the 38 Division in Mametz Wood at the earliest possible moment.⁴⁶

Later that day, arrangements were made for the Welsh Division to be withdrawn from the battle area to billets around Ribemont and Treux, about 9 miles away. The battalions already outside the Wood were to begin marching that afternoon. Those still fighting 'will on relief march to the CITADEL $\frac{1}{3}$ miles from the Wood' and bivouac for the night' before proceeding to the billeting area.⁴⁷ By the time the last unit left the wood for the CITADEL however it was 6.30 am on 12th July and there was little time for rest. At dawn the following morning the 115th Brigade began its long march behind the other two Brigades:

The clear air and fresh sunlight, the green fields, the white road and the pale blue sky all combined together to make a fit setting for a pageant of youth in bright colours. There was a quality in the hour and the place, a harmony in the open countryside, indescribable save in terms of serenity..... Against this background of freshness and purity a slow-moving worm of dingy yellow twisted itself round the corner made by a jutting shoulder of downland. The battalions of the brigade were marching in column of fours along the road, and from a little distance it was clear that there was a lack of spine in the column. No ring of feet, no swing of shoulder, no sway of company; slack knees and frequent hitching of packs, a doddering rise and fall of heads, and much leaning forward. Fatigue and exhaustion in a body of men attain an intensity greater than the simple sum of all the individual burdens of its members warrant. This loss of quality in a unit marching away from the Somme battlefield was made more evident by the rising memory of the sturdy column that swung its way down the hedge-bound lanes in the early morning of the end of June, a bare fortnight past singing and laughing in the happiness of relief from the fetters of the trenches in Flanders. To-day the silence was unbroken save by the shuffling of feet and the clanking of equipment.

..... A walk along the column brought a new aspect of our condition to view. A captain was leading a battalion, subalterns and company sergeant-majors were marching at the heads of companies, corporals in front of platoons. Men were marching abreast who had never before stood together in the same file. There are no gaps in a battalion on the march, though many have fallen, but the closing-up that follows losses tells its own tale. The faces of many silent and hard-eyed men showed they were but half-aware of their new neighbours, newcomers who jostled the ghosts of old companions, usurpers who were themselves struggling against the same griefs and longings, marching forward with minds that looked backwards into time and space.⁴⁸

The 21st Division had little difficulties in clearing the remaining portion of Mametz Wood. The Germans sent out reconnaissance patrols from the Second line, but these offered no resistance and troops of the 21st Division reached the Northern edge of the Wood just after midday on 12th July. They found hundreds of German dead in the wood and 13 heavy guns.⁴⁹ As the Germans had evacuated the Wood on the night of 11th/12th July however, its capture can be attributed wholly to the 38th (Welsh) Division. It had cost them dearly. The casualties for the period 7th-12th July totalled nearly 4,000, including 600 killed and a like number missing:⁵⁰

Killed	46	officers	556	other ranks
Wounded	138	"	2,668	" "
Missing	6	"	579	" "
Total	190	"	3,803	" "

Some battalions were severely mauled, including the 16th Welsh (Cardiff City) Battalion which suffered more than 350 casualties - almost half its fighting strength. 'On the Somme' wrote Private Joshua afterwards, 'the Cardiff City Battalion died'.⁵¹

On the eve of the battle the Commander-in-Chief had urged the men of the Welsh Division to take the opportunity offered them 'of serving their King and Country at a critical period and earning for themselves great glory and distinction'. Two days later, they had succeeded in driving the Germans from the largest of all the woodlands on the Somme though with appalling casualties. Glory and distinction was not noticeably showered upon them. Instead they were bundled unceremoniously away to a quiet sector of the front, and took no further part in the fighting on the Somme.

NOTES ON CHAPTER FOUR

Epigraph: David Jones, In Parenthesis, 1937, p 165.

1. WO 95/921 XV Corps diary copy of 38 (Welsh) Division Order No 38, issued 2 am 9th July. This order gives two alternatives, depending on the outcome of the 2 am attack on Strip Trench. The choice between them was made by Maj-Gen. Phillips at 4 am (XV Corps diary Appendix 61A/26).
2. WO 95/921 XV Corps Diary, Appendix 61A/13.
3. *ibid.* Appendix 61A/19, Message to 17th and 38th Division from Corps Commander, issued 2 pm, 9th July.
4. WO 95/1981 17th Division War Diary. Entry for 9th/10th July. This was, in fact, the seventh attack on Quadrangle Support by the Division which had paid dearly for this limited success.
5. T O Marden, History of the Welch Regiment 1914-1918 p 384. Marden commanded the 114th Brigade at Mametz Wood and his book therefore contains a first hand record of the battle.
6. WO 95/921 XV Corps diary. Appendix 61A/23.
7. WO 95/2539 38th (Welsh) Division Order No 30 (Appendix X to War Diary).
8. WO 95/1639 Commander, Royal Artillery, 7th Division. Artillery Order No 19a (modified) dated 9th July 1916. The technique of the 'feint' was not generally promulgated to British units until 11th July, when GHQ OA225 advocated its use and attributed its development to the French (Copy in WO 95/2560, 115th Brigade War Diary).
9. Compiled from the following sources:
 - a. Mulmann und Mohs: Geschichte des Lehr Infanterie Regiments. Thuringen, 1935 pp 278-302.
 - b. Reichsarchivs monograph Somme-Nord: Band 20 in the series Schlachten des Weltkrieges 1927 (map section following p.280.)
 - c. Army Quarterly. Vol 9, No 2, 1925 pp 245-259. "The other side of the Hill" (from histories of the German 183, 184 and 122 Infantry Regiments).
10. Army Quarterly Vol 9, No 2 page 259, quoting the historian of the 183rd Infantry Regiment.
11. Martin Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme London 1971. p58.
12. It might be helpful in understanding what follows to remember that all battalions of the 113th Brigade were Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and all battalions of the 114th Brigade, Welsh Regiment, viz:

113th Brigade

13th RWF (1st North Wales)
14th RWF (Caernarvon & Anglesey)
15th RWF (London Welsh)
16th RWF (2nd North Wales)

114th Brigade

10th Welsh (1st Rhondda)
13th Welsh (2nd Rhondda)
14th Welsh (Swansea)
15th Welsh (Carmarthen)

The 115th Brigade was a mixed
brigade:

10th SWB (1st Gwent)
11th SWB (2nd Gwent)
16th Welsh (Cardiff City)
17th RWF

13. Jones, In Parenthesis, p 156
14. Arthur Conan Doyle, The British Campaign in France and Flanders 1916 London 1918, p 126.
15. WO 95/2556. 16th RWF War Diary. Appendix I: report by Major JRH McLellan.
16. CHD Ward, Regimental Records of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers 1914-1918, p 206.
17. ibid. p 206 Narrative account by Captain J Glynn Jones, 14th RWF.
18. T J Price, Letter to the author, 26 Jan 1974.
19. Richard Lyons, From notes written for the author in August 1972. Mr Lyons points out that only officers carried compasses which became scarce as officer casualties mounted.
20. Griffith Jones, Letter to the author 1974.
21. Ward, Regimental Records of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers 1914-1918. p. 207
22. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol.2 p 51, Also CRA 7th Division War Diary (WO 95/1639) entry for 5.26 am, 10th July.
23. Haig MS. Diary entry for 10th July.
24. The German account of fighting in Mametz Wood on 10th July is from Geschichte des Lehr Regiments pp 296-299.
25. WO 95/2552. 113th Brigade War Diary. Appendix 15: Summary of the action at Mametz Wood by Brig-Gen Price Davies (dated 14th July 1916).
26. David Jones. Letter to the author dated 24th March 1971. David Jones made use of this incident in his book In Parenthesis:
....and Jesus Christ-they're coming through the floor
end thwart and overlong:
Jerry's through on the flank....and: Beat it!-
that's what that one said as he ran past:
Boches back in Strip Trench - it's a
monumental bollocks every time.....

27. WO 95/2557. 114th Brigade War Diary. Appendix C: Report on operations of 10/11 July by Brig-Gen Marden (dated 16th July 1916).
28. WO 95/921. XV Corps War Diary, Appendices B62/6 and 6A: Messages to XV Corps from 4th Army observation post and from XIII Corps HQ.
29. Army Quarterly Vol 9.No 2.1925. "The other side of the hill". p 257.
30. Rawlinson MS, Entry in Journal for 10th July 1916
31. Haig MS. Diary entry for 10th July 1916
32. WO 95/2560. 115th Brigade War Diary entry for 11th July; also Appendix IX - 115th Brigade Operational Order No 64 (10th July) which begins:
 'The Brigade will occupy and hold at all costs MAMETZ WOOD'.
 Brigadier Evans was obviously unaware that the battalions in the Wood had been drawn back from the previous position 50 yards from the Northern edge.
33. WO 95/2557. 114th Brigade War Diary. Appendix C.
34. WO 95/2560. 115th Brigade War Diary entry for 11th July
35. Ll. Wyn Griffith, Up to Mametz pp 208-213
36. WO 95/2560. 115th Brigade War Diary, 11th July. Griffith uses identical wording, and must have had before him either the diary or the message itself when writing his account some years afterwards. Up to Mametz, p 218.
37. Griffith, Up to Mametz. p 219. The 16th Welsh and 11th SWB were, of course, "fresh" in the sense that they had not taken part in any fighting in the wood, but they were still recovering from their exertions of 7th July and the day before (10th July) they had been fetching and carrying for the 113th and 114th Brigades.
38. *ibid* p 221. Unknown to Capt Griffith, one of the runners chosen to bear the message he had written was his younger brother, Private Watcyn Griffith of the 17th RWF. He was killed before he reached Queen's Nullah. Capt. Griffith heard the news a few hours later.
39. WO 95/1639. Commander, Royal Artillery, 7th Division War Diary - entry for 11.15 am on 11th July. See also War diary of the 35th Brigade RFA (WO 95/1643). It is difficult to establish the exact time at which the barrage lifted but it is quite clear that it went on beyond 3 pm, the scheduled time for the infantry attack. The entry in the CRA, 7th Division diary says 'G/General Staff/ order bombardment 2.45-3 pm on north edge of wood and 150 yards back. 21st Divn. Artillery will bombard west of Railway, Pearl Wood and Alley. 80th, 35th and 122nd Brigades will bombard northern strip of wood, Flatiron and Sabot copses. All will lift at 3 pm on to the German Second line'. The Official History

says that interrupted telephone communications caused half an hours delay: 'At 3.30 pm the British Artillery ceased firing on the Northern edge of the wood'. The 115th Brigade diary also says that the bombardment lasted until 3.30 pm but the diary of the 35th Brigade RFA (7th Division) records that their batteries 'bombarded northern edge of Mametz Wood till 3.15 pm'.

40. WO 95/1643. 22nd Brigade RFA, War Diary. Entry for 11th July 1916: 'Fighting in MAMETZ WOOD still continues but our advance has now progressed so far that batteries are becoming out of range.'
41. WO 95/2560. 115th Brigade War Diary. 11th July 1916.
42. *ibid.*
43. Mulmann und Mohs, Geschichte des Lehr Infanterie Regiments. p 293
44. The War Diary of the 115th Brigade records that at 4 pm, prisoners from the 77th Regiment and 122nd Regiment were taken who "stated that 1000 men had been thrown into the Wood on the night of 10/11th July".
45. Mulmann und Mohs, Geschichte des Lehr Infanterie Regiments, p 300.
46. WO 95/921 XV Corps War Diary. Appendix 63/7
47. WO 95/2539 38th Division War Diary Appendix 12
48. Griffith, Up to Mametz. pp 231-234.
49. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol. 2 p 54
50. The figures are taken from Marden: The Welch Regiment 1914-1918. p 390. Marden also gives figures for each battalion of the Welsh Regiment involved in the fighting (but not for battalions of the other two Regiments represented in the Division). These figures are approximately the same as those recorded in the battalion diaries. It has not been possible to check Marden's figure for the Division as a whole as the complete casualty figures for all the RWF battalions are not recorded. There is no reason to doubt the figure of about 4,000 which is also given in the Official History.
51. William Joshua. Letter to the author, 25 Jan. 1974

CHAPTER FIVE Conclusions

.....and when the chemical
thick air dispels you see briefly and with great
clearness
what kind of a show this is.

The attack on Bazentin Ridge

As soon as the 38th (Welsh) Division had penetrated Mametz Wood on 10th July, Rawlinson made up his mind to attack Bazentin Ridge on the 13th. As we have seen however he failed at first to convince Haig of the soundness of his plan to assemble four divisions close to the German second line under cover of darkness and to attack at 'first streak of dawn'.¹ 'On the afternoon of the 11th', Rawlinson's Chief of Staff, General Montgomery, wrote afterwards, 'Sir Douglas Haig came down to our HQ and we had a tremendous discussion with him as to whether he would allow us to make the attack or not. If he had allowed this, we might have been able to get through the preparations by the 13th as already arranged. However he still dug his toes in and it was not until I rang up General Kiggell about 8 o'clock on the 12th before breakfast that we finally got leave, with certain qualifications, to make the attack'.² This caused a postponement of one day - a delay which, according to one commentator at least, was to prejudice the outcome of the battle.³

However, Haig's hesitation is understandable, for the plan involved great risks. The advance to the assembly positions within a few hundred yards of the German line was to be made at night across open ground for a distance varying from nearly a mile on the right, to about 300 yards on the left. If the Germans discovered the British plan beforehand, or were alerted by signs of movement on the night, their artillery and machine gun fire could annihilate thousands of British troops exposed on the bare hillside. Another difficulty was that Trones Wood on the right, which should have been captured beforehand to protect the flank, was still in the hands of the Germans who could easily follow-up a bombardment of the open ground on which the British were forming up with a counter-attack against the flank and rear of the British troops. The French could hardly believe that anyone would be so foolish as even to consider such a plan. When General Gouraud, Commanding the French Fourth Army, visited the area afterwards and reconnoitred the ground he said that 'none of our

troops could have carried it out⁴. The British staff however was completely confident and set about planning the operation with great care.

On the morning of 12th July, the British Artillery began a slow bombardment of the German defences along the 3 mile front. Because the front was much narrower than on 1st July it was possible to concentrate the artillery and provide one gun for every 6 yards of front, compared to 1 gun for every 20 yards on 1st July. About 370,000 shells were fired in the two days preceding the attack.⁵

The position of the British front line on the night of 13th/14th July, and the forming-up position for the assault troops are shown in Map 15. From this it can be seen that the two divisions of XIII Corps on the right - the 3rd and 9th Divisions - were to be assembled 1500 yards or so in front of the British trenches in Montauban Alley and well forward of the line in the southern tip of Trones Wood. On the left, the 21st and 7th Divisions of the XV Corps were already established nearer to the Germans, especially the former which occupied Mametz Wood only 3-400 yards short of the second line. In all, about 20,000 men from six brigades were to make the initial assault on the ridge. At the same time, the 54th Brigade of 18th Division was to attack Trones Wood from the south, to protect the right flank of the 9th Division.

After dark the troops moved forward unobserved by German sentries - even on the right where they advanced parallel to the western edge of Trones Wood, which bristled with German machine guns. Long lines of white canvas tape guided the troops forward and similar tapes, placed laterally, marked each forming up position. By 3 am - barely half an hour before the attack was to begin - all six brigades were in position with scarcely the loss of a man and with no serious interference from German patrols.

At 3.20 am 'the whole sky behind the waiting infantry of the four attacking divisions seemed to open with a great roar of flame. For five minutes the ground in front was alive with bursting shells, whilst the machine-guns, firing on lines laid out just before dark on the previous evening, pumped streams of bullets to clear the way'.⁶

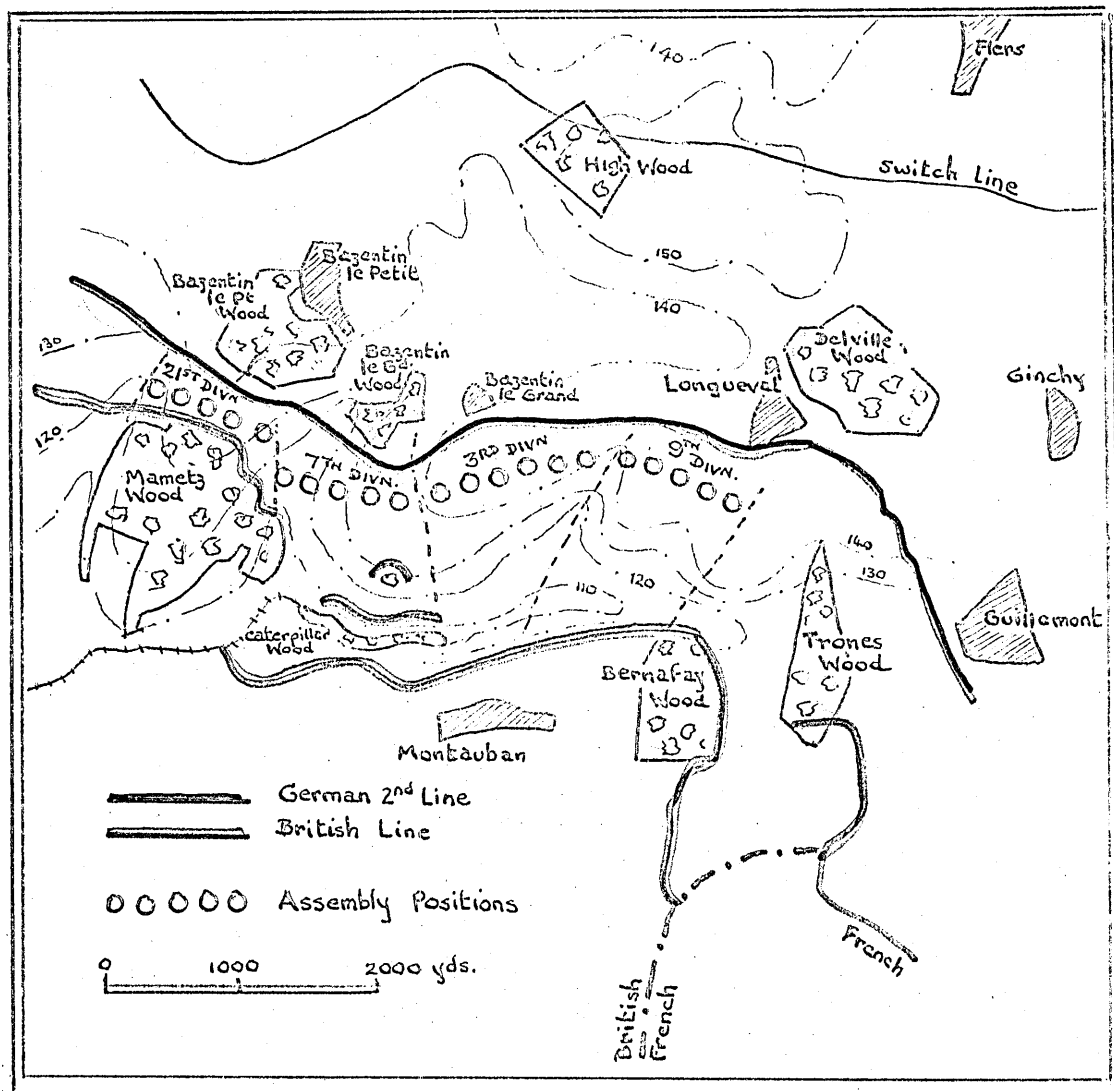


FIG 15. BAZENTIN RIDGE. 14TH JULY 1916.

At 3.25 am the artillery lifted and the thirteen leading battalions - twelve of them New Army battalions - went into the attack. On the left, the 21st and 7th Divisions entered the German trenches almost as soon as the guns had lifted. On the right, the 3rd and 9th Divisions of XIII Corps encountered unbroken wire which they had either to cut by hand or outflank before they could continue. Very soon, they too had captured long stretches of the German line except near Longueval where the 27th Brigade of 9th Division met fierce resistance. On the left, British troops continued to advance and quickly captured Bazentin-le-Petit and Bazentin-le-Grand villages and Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The sections of the German line which had so far eluded capture now fell to bombers working round from the flanks. While the main attack went well, the 18th Division in Trones Wood found themselves hampered, like the 38th Division in Mametz Wood before them, by thick undergrowth and fallen trees. Not until 9.30 am - 6 hours after the assault on the ridge - was the wood cleared and the right flank secured.

Although bitter fighting continued in Longueval and nearby Delville Wood, elsewhere the opposition crumbled. The 3rd and 7th Divisions in the centre were keen to push on beyond their objectives to High Wood on the crest of the ridge overlooking the German 3rd line on the reverse slope. At 10 am several officers walked towards the wood without attracting attention but in spite of this, General Watts (7th Division) was instructed by XV Corps to stay where he was until the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division, which had been ordered up at 7.40 am from Carnoy (4 miles away) had taken the wood. The cavalry moved off soon after 7.40 but made slow progress over shell-torn, wet and slippery ground and by noon was still south of Montauban.⁷ The order for the cavalry advance was therefore cancelled and Fourth Army sanctioned instead an advance on High Wood by 7th Division. For some unexplained reason, XV Corps now preferred to wait until Longueval had fallen and it was not until 6.45 pm (after Longueval had wrongly been reported as captured) that 7th Division, supported on the right by cavalry, advanced on High Wood from the neighbourhood of Bazentin-le-Grand, three quarters of a mile away. At first the going was easy but as they approached the wood the Germans mounted a strong counter-attack from the west which, though repulsed, prevented the 7th Division from entering the wood until 8.40 pm.⁸ Once inside the wood the British troops moved forward almost unopposed

until they reached the German 'Switch Line' running through the northern corner (see map 15) which was strongly defended. They dug themselves in on a line running through the centre of the wood where they remained during the night. Outside the wood, the cavalry reached the high ground between the wood and Longueval but failing light soon brought all movement to a halt. In the morning they were relieved by infantry.

During the night, the Germans strengthened the Switch Line and brought forward reserves.⁹ On 15th July they counter-attacked fiercely in High Wood and Lt-Gen Horne ordered 7th Division to withdraw completely from the wood which remained for two more months in German hands. Thus the momentum of Rawlinson's boldly conceived attack was lost, never to be regained. From that time forward, the Battle of the Somme degenerated into a battle of attrition.¹⁰

Lt.Col. J H Boraston, co-author with George A B Dewar of Sir Douglas Haig's Command had no doubt where the fault lay: with the 38th (Welsh) Division for failing to 'secure' Mametz Wood at an early date. Writing in 1919, he said:

The days lost here were of the greatest value to the enemy. They gave him the opportunity he needed to restore order among his defeated battalions, to bring up fresh troops and to reorganise his defences. Though he could not prevent us from carrying his second line system in our next assault, he was enabled so to strengthen his last remaining defences on the crest and reverse slopes of the ridge beyond that our advance was held up there when within measurable distance of effecting an actual breakthrough.

There is little risk of exaggerating the effect of three days' delay at this stage of the battle, when every hour was of importance. To be seen in the right perspective the incident must be viewed from the standpoint of July 14, when a most brilliant operation came within an ace of achieving a great victory On July 14 our troops broke through the last completed defence line and at High Wood reached the crest of the ridge overlooking the half-finished line running through Flers. For a moment it seemed as though the German front would be completely pierced. Certainly, could our hold on the ridge have been extended to the east where our cavalry endeavoured to push their way forward, and could High Wood have been finally cleared and held, an attack on the Flers line could have been pressed on with excellent chances of breaking through to the open country. The narrowness of the margin by which the German line was saved at this point is the measure of the value of the days lost at Mametz Wood High Wood, situated on the very crest of the ridge, represented an advance of two miles from our old positions. Held by our troops, it threatened the safety of the whole German battle line, opening out to us the slopes and spurs

falling away northwards to the eastern arm of the upper Ancre valley, with Bapaume and the Loupart Wood on the rising ground beyond. But the opportunity had come too late. Through the northern corner of the wood and along the high ground to the east and west there now stretched Switch lines which barred the passage of our troops, while the gathering strength of the enemy's reserves showed itself in counter-attacks of increasing violence and determination. After holding High Wood for a night and a day, our troops were withdrawn a distance of about a mile to the general line of the Longueval-Bazentin road. Though by the end of the month we had again worked our way forward to the southern point of the Wood, it was not until September 15, two months after we first entered it, that the wood was gained and the crest with it.

In the course of those two months, trench systems, switch lines, strong points, and belts of wire were multiplied across the whole space from High Wood to Bapaume. That was a part of the price paid for the check at Mametz Wood.¹¹

Boraston does not mince his words. The British Army, he is saying, would have penetrated to Flers and the open country beyond if the 38th (Welsh) Division had shown more determination at Mametz Wood. In other words, he blames the Welsh Division alone for the failure of the British Army to achieve a 'great victory' during this phase of the Battle of the Somme. This is a serious charge, but is it fair?

Setting on one side, for the moment, the argument that the Battle of the Somme - other than as a battle of attrition - was doomed to failure before it began, it is worth examining the course of events from 1st to 14th July to see if those at Mametz Wood were of special significance and, if so, whether anything could, or should, have been done to speed up the capture of the wood.

The Welsh Division took five days to capture Mametz Wood. They took over the line on the night of 5th/6th July and were ordered to attack on the 7th. The attack failed and was not remounted in any strength until 10th July, when the division entered the wood and, after two days of bitter fighting, forced the Germans to withdraw. Boraston's criticisms probably relate to the events preceding the 10th July for he judges the final attack a success and talks of three days delay rather than five. Referring to the attack on 7th July he says:

In the centre, however, the attack of the 38th Division on Mametz Wood failed, the advance of the 17th Division on their left was swept by fire from Mametz Wood and held up, and, lacking support on their right, the 23rd Division were later in the day forced back from Contalmaison. The 38th Division were

ordered to repeat their attack on the afternoon of July 7 and again on the morning of the 8th, when the 17th also attacked; but the situation at Mametz Wood remained unchanged. Further orders were given to the 38th Division to gain a footing in Mametz Wood on the afternoon of the 8th and to exploit their gains on the morning of the 9th. No attack took place, and the 23rd Division, who on that afternoon had again succeeded in entering Contalmaison, were for a second time unable to maintain their position.¹²

Not only did 38th Division fail to capture Mametz Wood during this period, Boraston says, but their failure to do so made it impossible for the 23rd Division to hold on to Contalmaison. Boraston implies, in effect, that Contalmaison could not be held against a German counter-attack unless Mametz Wood was also in British hands. But a glance at Map 4 soon demolishes this argument, or shows at least that it was not a view held by the British High Command. The British objectives for 1st July had included Contalmaison village but not Mametz Wood. And, as the battle developed during the succeeding two or three days, the possession of Contalmaison village was seen as necessary to ensure that Mametz Wood could be held, rather than the other way around. 'Contalmaison is of such importance to the secure possession of Mametz Wood that it must be captured and held', Kiggell wrote on 8th July.¹³ Nor did Rawlinson believe that the 38th Division were responsible for the 23rd Division's withdrawal from Contalmaison. 'In the pm', he wrote in his journal on 7th July, 'we lost Contalmaison without sufficient excuse I think as it is reported we were shelled out'.¹⁴ Thus, whatever failures there may have been on the part of the 38th (Welsh) Division during their first few days of fighting, they cannot justly be accused of prejudicing the capture of Contalmaison village.

But there are also flaws in Colonel Boraston's main criticism. If a delay of 3 days in the capture of Mametz Wood had such a crucial effect on the course of the war, why was no attack mounted until 7th July? Why are the 3 days singled out by Boraston more important than any of the other eleven which lapsed between the opening of the Battle of the Somme and the attack on Bazentin Ridge?

As we have seen, on the 1st July the 7th Division broke through Mametz village and by the evening of the 2nd they were in possession

of White Trench just south of Mametz Wood. Writing of these events in 1930, a staff officer of the 7th Division recalled a feeling at HQ 7th Division that 'a great opportunity was being let slip on the evening of 1st July' a feeling which, he said, was shared by troops in the front line:

After the fall of Mametz (by 6 pm on 1st July) the enemy's resistance had been well broken on the front of 30th, 13th and 7th Divisions. Certain localities outside the final objective could have been captured with very small loss, which subsequently were very costly to take.

The most notable of these were Mametz Wood and Caterpillar Wood. To my certain knowledge there were hardly any of the enemy in the former at this time: our infantry in Bunny Alley and White Trench were very keen to push on, but right up to the time of the division relief on 6th July no concerted forward move on [XV] Corps front was permitted, other than by patrols.....

An advance by 17th Division through 7th Division from the south against Mametz Wood could have been undertaken at dawn on 2nd July, as the whole front here was stable, and defined by 6 pm on 1st July. Moreover the capture of Mametz Wood by that division in conjunction with an advance by [III] Corps on the left, would have facilitated and shortened the operations which were so long drawn out and costly, subsequently undertaken to capture Contalmaison and the area between that village, Mametz Wood itself and Fricourt Farm. Had this been done German reinforcements could have been prevented from tricking down to this area.¹⁵.....

The Official History also echoes this theme of lost opportunities during the early days of the battle. 'XV Corps HQ', the history records, 'had received many reports to show that on its front the enemy had not yet rallied, and at 3 pm [on 3rd July] patrols found that Mametz Wood and Quadrangle Trench were empty'.¹⁶ The account goes on to say that, at about 5 pm, Lieut-General Horne the Corps Commander, gave permission for the 7th Division to occupy the southern edge of Mametz Wood after dark and also Strip Trench, Wood Trench and the Eastern end of Quadrangle Trench. Needless to say, if these formidable defences had been taken at this early stage, Mametz Wood would have fallen much more easily than it subsequently did and the Welsh Division, and more particularly the 17th (Northern) Division on its left, would have been spared much bloodshed. However, the guide sent to bring forward the two battalions of the 7th Division for this purpose (the 2nd Royal Irish and the 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers) 'went astray' and dawn broke before the troops were ready to advance. 'It would appear' says the official history 'that if the XV Corps had encouraged more vigorous action on the afternoon of the 3rd, a hold on Mametz Wood could have been secured, and Wood Trench and Quadrangle Trench occupied. The

last-named objective was taken on the morning of the 5th, but the others were to cost many lives and much precious time'.¹⁷

Three days could also have been saved if the attack on Bazentin Ridge had been launched on the morning of 11th July when the 38th Division had captured all but the northern edge of the wood and was badly in need of relief. An attack at this moment would have caught the Germans at a time when they were particularly vulnerable and were desperately moving troops out of the second line at Bazentin-le-Petit to defend Mametz Wood. The British Fourth Army however was not yet ready for an attack. Haig was still brooding over Rawlinson's plans and the artillery had to destroy the wire in front of the German second line, a task which was not in fact completed in time for an attack on the 13th let alone the 11th.¹⁸ It was this lack of continuity in British operations more than anything else which gave the Germans ample opportunity to mend their broken defences and bring forward their reserves. And if, as Boraston not unreasonably suggests, 'every hour was of importance' to the achievement of victory, Rawlinson need not even have waited until 11th July. As we have seen, as early as 9th July he had doubts about the need to wait for the capture of Mametz Wood before launching his attack against the ridge. There was of course a grave risk of a counter attack against his flank if Mametz Wood was not secure but it was a risk he took at Trones Wood on the right flank on 14th July, and which he would have been justified in taking on the left if this would have made the difference between ultimate victory and failure.

It seems therefore that Boraston has done the 38th Division a grave injustice, perhaps because of his evident dislike of Lloyd George, which comes out so clearly in his book. Whether or not their performance at Mametz Wood was all that it should have been - and we shall examine that in a moment - it is not fair to blame the division for the subsequent failure of the British Army to break the German line and sweep through to victory. There would have to be something very wrong with British plans if a check - avoidable or otherwise - to one division, out of a total of some 24 divisions¹⁹ involved in the operations up to that time, could have prejudiced the main stroke.

Comments on the 38th Division

But if Colonel Boraston's extreme arguments are easily demolished, the question still remains: was the performance of the Welsh Division at Mametz Wood creditable or not? Colonel Boraston is not the only critic. There were some nearer at hand, in the division itself.

Brigadier Price-Davies, commanding the 113th Brigade, frankly admits that because of his own inexperience, communications within his Brigade were practically non-existent, as was liaison between his own Headquarters and other brigades. Writing after the war, he said:

I was as much to blame as those on my flanks, probably more, as I had not been engaged in fighting when the Brigade went into the line.

I give only one instance. It must have been on 7th July when I was visiting my forward posts and looked down upon Mametz Wood at a few hundred yards' range. I was by a Lewis Gun post when I became aware of an attack in progress by what I believe were the 6th Dorsets /17th Division, then attacking Mametz Wood from the West whilst 38th Division (115 Brigade) attacked from the East/. They were creeping forward and using rifle grenades against the strip of wood jutting out towards us. I had never heard of this attack and got covering fire to work as quickly as possible, but the Lewis gun jammed and the attack fizzled outWe occupied a position from which very heavy covering²⁰ fire could have been brought to bear had this been organised.

Price-Davies was also disappointed with the performance of his own troops when their turn came to attack on 10th July. A few days after they had been relieved in the wood, his Brigade Major delivered this assessment to the battalion commanders:

After a careful consideration of the accounts of the action the Brigadier General Commanding has the following remarks to make on the events of July 10th and the night of 10th/11th.

The initial advance against the wood appears to have been carried out with the utmost gallantry by all ranks in the face of a heavy fire from artillery and small arms. After the wood was entered, however, and certainly by the time the first objective was reached the sting had gone from the attack and a certain degree of demoralisation set in. The desire to press on had vanished and it was only by the utmost strenuous efforts on the part of a few officers that it was possible to make progress.

The demoralisation increased towards evening on the 10th and culminated in a disgraceful panic during which many left the wood whilst others seemed quite incapable of understanding, or unwilling to carry out the simplest order. A few stout-hearted Germans would have stampeded the whole of the troops in the wood.

Later in the night, rapid fire was opened on the slightest alarm, and several of our men were hit and one officer was killed by this indisciplined action.

The Brigadier General Commanding wishes all credit given for the early success but thinks we should recognise and face our failures
.....²¹

Battalion commanders in the 113th Brigade were later told to instill in their men 'that the word "retire" is not to be used and that any man using it is liable to be shot on the spot. Officers must deal with all cases of indiscipline of this nature which can only be stamped out by the most drastic action'.²²

Brig-Gen. Price Davies's account to Divisional Headquarters was similarly critical of the battalions under his command but he had second thoughts when he heard reports of the difficulties which others had encountered, in Trones Wood and High Wood; difficulties which were not dissimilar from those experienced by his own troops in Mametz Wood.

My report was made up after the receipt of the accounts furnished by Battalion Commanders and from my own personal experience. Since then, however, I have had the accounts of certain gallant actions performed by Officers and other ranks, and I feel that possibly I may not have given my Brigade full credit for what they did in Mametz Wood.

This is probably in great part due to the painful impression left on Lt. Col. Bell and myself (the two senior officers and the only Regular Officers of the Brigade who witnessed the fight and did not become casualties) by the discreditable behaviour of the men of the Division who fled in panic at about 8.45 pm on July 10th.

The result has been that the initial success of entering the wood in the face of heavy Artillery and Small Arm fire has not been brought to notice sufficiently.

I feel that some Brigadiers who have made a very readable story with the material available. They would, no doubt, have dwelt upon the capture of guns in the Wood, and on the number of Machine Guns to our credit, as well as upon the difficulties of attacking through a thick wood in the face of Snipers and Machine Guns.

Even so, Price-Davies is sparing in his praise:

Though I deprecate all forms of bragging and consider that when failure is disclosed it should be faced, I think it is possible that a certain amount of praise, in fact making the most of such successes as we obtain, is good for morale and improves the confidence and self-respect of the men.²³

Captain Glynn Jones of the 14th RWF, one of Price-Davies's battalions, also thought there was little to be proud of during the fighting in the wood. It was, he wrote afterwards, 'nothing less than a glorious mess, from which only the few remaining pawns in the game returned with glory'.²⁴

But the most telling criticism of all is contained in some notes compiled by Major GPL Drake-Brockman in 1930, well after the heat of the event.

Drake-Brockman was a regular soldier and staff officer who transferred from 7th Division Headquarters to 38th Division Headquarters on 8th July and who was therefore in a position to observe the performance of the Welsh Division with the eye of a newcomer detached from the field of battle. He found little fault with the fighting troops whom he describes as 'really good material' but he was appalled by the way the division was being run:

The 38th Division suffered from having a number of senior officers who owed their appointments to their political positions or to being friends of Mr Lloyd George. I can quote two glaring examples.....

Major General I Philipps. Was appointed to the command of the division in early 1915, when it was formed. He had originally been a regular soldier but had retired before the war, and at the time hostilities started was a Major or Lieut. Colonel in the Pembrokeshire Yeomanry, and a Member of Parliament. He was thus promoted over the heads of many more senior and meritorious officers.

As a divisional commander it is hardly surprising that he was ignorant, lacked experience and failed to inspire confidence.

Lieut-Colonel David Davies O C 16 RWF [sic]. A politician pure and simple who knew nothing about soldiering before the war: his chief claim to fame was that he had subscribed much money to Mr Lloyd George's Liberal party fund.

It is therefore not to be wondered at that an influential political atmosphere permeated the whole division and was in some cases the cause of considerable friction. Brigadier/s found it difficult to get rid of officers who were useless, since.... they were often the constituents or political supporters of the divisional commander, who held a high opinion of their capabilities.²⁵

Fortunately, according to Drake-Brockman, the GS01 of the division, Lieut-Colonel Rhys Pryce, was a very capable officer 'who in reality commanded the division himself', and there were some 'excellent' battalion commanders - mainly those from the Indian Army.

With Ivor Philipps in command it is hardly surprising, in Drake-Brockman's view, that the division 'did not distinguish itself in its first engagement, though later in the war, under different commanders, it did extremely well'. Ivor Philipps is criticised for carrying out piecemeal attacks, one brigade at a time and for making it known beforehand that he did not wish attacks pressed home in the face of machine gun fire. In such circumstances, battalions were instructed to return to the starting line until another artillery bombardment had been carried out:

By the time, therefore, that General Watts took over command of the division on 9th July, it is not to be wondered at that the infantry were considerably discouraged and exhausted after three day's fighting of this nature.

Conversely these half-hearted attacks encouraged the enemy considerably so that instead of evacuating Mametz Wood as he appears to have intended, he kept reinforcing his troops in the wood.

This, coupled with the extremely thick and impenetrable nature of the wood rendered the final attack a very much more formidable affair than it would have been three days earlier - in fact Mametz Wood on 10th July was a really tough proposition and the division deserves credit for what it did do after being "messed about" for three days.

This, as we have seen, is the interpretation which both Haig and Rawlinson placed on the events at Mametz Wood: that under Ivor Philipps the Welsh Division lacked guts and determination but responded well to a new commander.

Drake-Brockman also tells a story of the recall to England of Lt. Col. David Davies and two other officers at the request of Lloyd George who sent a personal telegram to Ivor Philipps a short time before the division went into action:

There can only be one reason for the recall of these officers and it was certainly a widespread impression in 38th Division at the time - namely that from a political point of view their lives were too valuable to be lost.

I mention this incident because I think it must be almost a record instance for political interference and dishonesty with the

fighting portion of the Army in France. Particularly is it an illustration of the disadvantages under which the 38th Division functioned, which in no small measure accounts for the very poor performance put up by it during the period under review. Consequent to the elimination of this political atmosphere under the leadership of Major-General Blackader the division did extremely well during the rest of the war. I served with the 38th Division for 10 months, but for the whole of this period the stigma of Mametz Wood stuck to the division and it was common talk in the B.E.F. that 38th Division had "bolted" and the fact remains that 38th Division was never employed again on the Somme.

Actually Drake-Brockman was wrong in thinking that there could be 'only one reason' for the recall of David Davies to England. On 7th July, the very day on which his 'Welsh Army' launched its first attack on Mametz Wood, Lloyd George took over as Secretary of State for War and appointed David Davies as his Parliamentary Private Secretary.²⁶ Nevertheless, what matters in this context is the impression made on the division and it is certainly true that the 14th RWF, which Colonel David Davies had commanded, suffered more than any other battalion from lack of firm leadership. It is, of course, difficult for a second in command to take over on the eve of a battle and this may account for the confusion on 10th July when, by mistake, only two companies of the 14th RWF went into the attack, the other two being left behind until much later in the day.²⁷ Ten years afterwards, Glynn Jones, a company commander in the 14th RWF, recalled the inadequate briefing he was given before the battle.

Crowded round the door of a dug-out with the CO inside and hardly audible we were given some very small prints of the wood and what appeared to be instructions. They were verbal, decidedly 'sketchy' and to me appeared to be more like instructions for a ceremonial parade than an order for battle..... When I look back at what was intended to be our general method of advance I can well understand how it developed into what it did.....²⁸

But the most significant remark in Drake-Brockman's account is that for at least 10 months after the event it was common talk in other units that the Welsh Division had run away from the battle. It is difficult to tell just how widespread this was - Drake-Brockman was hardly in a position to know all the small-talk in the BEF - but it certainly seems to have been a view held in the 7th Division from which Drake-Brockman came, possibly because it was to the commander of that division, General Watts, that Price-Davies would have sent his report of 'discreditable behaviour' by troops under his command. Siegfried Sassoon, who was in 7th Division, spoke of 'wild rumours' reaching them of Welsh troops stampeding under machine-gun fire.²⁹ That this

poor opinion of the Welsh Division was not perhaps so widely held as Drake-Brockman suggests is apparent from the accounts of other observers who were in the vicinity at the time. General Brennan snatching a few days leave from another part of the front, cycled round the 'back areas of the battle' and arrived in Mametz Wood a day or two after the 14th July:

Its trees were torn and shattered, its leaves had turned brown and there was a shell-hole every three yards. This was a place where something almost unheard of in this war had taken place - fierce hand-to-hand fighting in the open with bombs and bayonets. What seemed extraordinary was that all the dead bodies there lay just as they had fallen in their original places as though they were being kept as an exhibit for a war museum. Germans in their field-grey uniforms, British in their khaki lying side by side, their faces and their hands a pale waxy green, the colour of a rare marble. Heads covered with flat mushroom helmets next to heads in domed steel helmets that came down behind the ears. Some of these figures still sat with their backs against a tree and two of them - this had to be seen to be believed - stood locked together by their bayonets which had pierced one another's bodies and sustained in that position by the tree trunk against which they had fallen. I felt I was visiting a room in Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, for I could not imagine any of those bodies having ever been alive. Yet the effect in its morbid way was beautiful.³⁰

This is not a scene which suggests that the Welsh Division had 'bolted' in the face of the enemy; on the contrary, it is a picture of 'fierce fighting with bombs and bayonets' the like of which Brennan had never seen before.

Lieut. St. H Evans, 9th Battalion Welsh Regiment, 19th Division, which was in Mametz Wood on 23rd July, was also unaware of 'wild' rumours:

This spot was lately made famous for all time when it was captured by the Welsh Division in which by some stroke of the pen we are not included. Yet we may claim a share as here we are, holding on and in close support ready to move up..... In this one-time pleasant wood now largely splintered to fragments with whole trunks fallen at all angles and the ground cratered out of all semblance we dig for dear life.³¹

Lieut. Evans was obviously proud of the achievement of the Welsh Division and disappointed that his own battalion was not part of it. The signs of fierce fighting in Mametz Wood also made an impression on another officer, Capt. D V Kelly of the 21st Division which had taken over the wood from the 38th:

On the 13th July I walked over to Mametz Wood to see General Rawlings, who commanded the 62nd Brigade and was in a German dugout on the western edge of the wood..... The wood was everywhere smashed by shell-fire and littered with dead - a German sniper hung over a branch horribly resembling a scarecrow, but half the trees had had their branches shot away, leaving fantastic jagged stumps like a Dulac picture of some goblin forest..... Along the west edge ran a trench, from the side of which in places protruded the arms and legs of carelessly buried men, and as our men moved up that night to attack dozens of them shook hands with these ghastly relics. All the old 'rides' through the wood were blocked by fallen trees and great shell-holes, and over all hung the overwhelming smell of corpses, turned-up earth and lachrymatory gas.³²

Frank Richards, in Old Soldiers Never Die talks of 'the ground all around us being thick with dead of the troops who had been attacking Mametz Wood' ³³ and Robert Graves in Goodbye to All That tells much the same story:

The next two days we spent in bivouacs outside Mametz Wood. We were in fighting kit and felt cold at night, so I went into the wood to find German overcoats to use as blankets. It was full of dead Prussian Guards Reserve, big men, and dead Royal Welch and South Wales Borderers of the New Army battalions, little men. Not a single tree in the wood remained unbroken. I collected my overcoats, and came away as quickly as I could, climbing through the wreckage of green branches. Going and coming, by the only possible route, I passed by the bloated and stinking corpse of a German with his back propped against a tree. He had a green face, spectacles, close-shaven hair; black blood was dripping from the nose and beard. I came across two other unforgettable corpses; a man of the South Wales Borderers and one of the Lehr Regiment had succeeded in bayoneting each other simultaneously. A survivor of the fighting told me later that he had seen a young soldier of the Fourteenth Royal Welch bayoneting a German in parade-ground style, automatically exclaiming: 'In, out, on guard!' ³⁴

There is therefore plenty of evidence that the fight was exceptionally hard and it is noteworthy that few, if any, other actions on this scale made such an impression on the writers who were to emerge after the First World War.

If some senior officers in the Welsh Division were critical of the troops under their command, others were more inclined to praise them. In a special order of the day issued to the 114th Brigade on 13th July, Brig.-Gen. Marden congratulated all ranks on their achievements of the 10th July 'when they firmly established the fighting reputation of the 114th Infantry Brigade by capturing that portion of the Mametz Wood allotted to them by the Divisional Commander, thereby gaining the thanks of the Commander-in-Chief for the performance of a task

which called for special effort.' 'Wood fighting', Marden continued, 'is recognised as the most difficult form of fighting and it reflects the greatest credit on all engaged that at the end of the day all units of the Brigade were under their own commanders. The advance to the attack was carried out in perfect order by the 13th and 14th Welsh, to whom fell the majority of the wood fighting, the severity of which is shown by the casualty lists. The 10th and the 15th Welsh showed equal steadiness in the advance when called on to support..... With such a splendid start, the 114th Infantry Brigade can look with confidence to the future, and with pride to the past'.³⁵ In his official report of the attack, Marden expressed the opinion that all ranks 'behaved with great dash and gallantry in the face of considerable fire'.³⁶ and after the war he told Brig.-Gen. Edmonds, the official historian, that the Commander of the 14th Welsh, Lt. Col. Hayes, had written to him saying that the officers and men of his battalion fought better than they did at Pilckem Ridge in the third Battle of Ypres 'and got far less credit for it' - a sentiment with which Marden said he agreed.³⁷

Analysis

The critics of the Welsh Division's performance during the period 7th-9th July were, of course, unaware of the extent to which the division's Headquarters was being directed from above. Whatever Ivor Philipps's shortcomings in the field, he cannot fairly be blamed for making piecemeal attacks 'one brigade at a time' when he was merely carrying out the orders of Lt. Gen. Horne at XV Corps HQ. It was XV Corps which decided on a two-pronged attack on 7th July from positions well over a mile apart. Maj.-Gen. Philipps could perhaps have organised more support by the 113th Brigade perched in White Trench and overlooking both attacks (see Brigadier Price-Davies's remarks on page 135, and Map 9 on page 73) but the role of the 113th Brigade - again dictated by XV Corps - was to stand ready to enter the wood by the southern tongue after the other troops had penetrated from east and west. The evidence suggests that XV Corps interfered far too readily in work which should have been left to divisional commanders and spent too little time coordinating their efforts. It may be, of course, that XV Corps was reluctant to trust either Ivor Philipps or the commander of 17th Division, Major General Pilcher, for like Philipps. Pilcher was relieved of his command a few days later. 'After taking the Quadrangle Trench',

he wrote to Brig.-Gen. Edmonds after the war, 'we wanted, I think, two days before attempting a further general advance. Then by orders from the Corps, I attacked at about 11 pm [6th July] and was driven back. This attack was quite justifiable and the casualties suffered in it were the result of the fortunes of war. The division on my right was in the early morning to attack Mametz Wood. It was about 7 am that I was ordered on the telephone to attack again over an open plain position which I had been unable to get near under cover of darkness'. General Pilcher was shocked to receive this order:

I protested...and begged to be allowed to confine my operations to a bombing attack, but the reply I received was a definite command to make a frontal attack. For several minutes I pondered and once again took up the telephone with the object of informing the corps that I must refuse to carry out that order, and begged to resign my command. Then I thought that the only consequence of such action would be that someone else would be put in my place and would probably carry out the operation in such a manner that far greater loss would be incurred than if I were to undertake it myself, and I issued orders in accordance with the instructions I had received, employing a minimum number of men. If four times as many had been launched the only consequence would have been four times as many casualties. Neither Mametz Wood, the high ground on my right, nor Contalmaison, the height on my left, had fallen, nor indeed were they being seriously attacked and in such circumstances to attack the low ground between these heights was iniquitous folly.

Two subsequent attacks were ordered by the corps with the same result.

When four or five days later Contalmaison and Mametz Wood were carried Quadrangle Support fell of itself.

If I had obeyed the Corps more literally, I should have lost another two or three thousand men and have achieved no more. I was, as you know, accused of want of push, and consequently sent home. It is very easy to sit a few miles in the rear, and get credit for allowing men to be killed in an undertaking foredoomed to failure, but the part did not appeal to me, and my protests against these useless attacks were not well received.³⁸

One can only sympathise with General Pilcher and the 17th Division but it is idle to suppose that the Welsh Division could have come to his assistance; they were a mile away and on the other side of the wood. Indeed, as we have seen, they failed themselves to reach the wood because of the deadly sweep of German guns across the intervening open ground. Even if they had forced their way into the hammerhead on the east side of the wood they would still have faced enormous difficulties. The 115th Brigade diary states that 'Owing to the

dense nature of the undergrowth it would have been impracticable to have carried out the programme for the attack as laid down by the time given even had no opposition been encountered'.³⁹ Nor did the XV Corps plans allow for any breakdown in communications and subsequent delay in the transmission of orders though this was a common enough event, and particularly important in view of the distance between the spot selected by XV Corps for 115th Brigade HQ and the attacking troops.

If the attacks planned for 7th July were 'iniquitous folly', subsequent events came near to farce. As related in Chapter 3, XV Corps ordered a raid on the wood during the night of 7th/8th. Brig.-Gen. Price-Davies (113th Brigade), who was given discretion by Corps to choose the spot, decided to attack Strip Trench using a whole battalion. Corps immediately intervened, repeating their request for a small-scale probe. Lt.Col.Gwyther, whose battalion (14th RWF) had been chosen for the attack, could make little sense of it all:

I received verbal orders from Brig.-Gen. Price-Davies, commanding 113th Infantry Brigade, on 7th July to attack the salient of Mametz Wood with the whole battalion at 2 am on 8th July.....Having issued orders for the same, I was very surprised when the brigade commander rang me up on the telephone on the night of 7th July and said he had received entirely new orders from 38th Divisional Headquarters to the effect that my attack must be undertaken with a much smaller force than was originally intended and which should amount to the strength of a platoon, including bombers; hastily fresh orders had to be issued at the eleventh hour and the party started off down the communication trench leading to the front line and our starting place, in good time under normal conditions; as however the communication trench was full of other troops of our brigade, progress was so slow that I attempted to get to the position overground, but found that our advance was so impeded by barbed wire and other obstacles that I considered it advisable to resort to the communication trench again, and the result was that the party arrived very late at the point from which the attack was to be made. Daylight was commencing, the element of surprise was problematical and I therefore decided not to risk men's lives unnecessarily and reported the situation to Brigade Headquarters. I consider that with my whole battalion I could have got a firm foothold in the wood.... I have never discovered why the bewildering and sudden change of orders on the night of 7th July were issued by Divisional Headquarters.⁴⁰

There is no record of what the raid - by less than 50 men - was supposed to achieve, but Gwyther's account gives an interesting example of the way in which 38th Division HQ was held responsible for failure

when they were in fact powerless to intervene. As we have seen, this particular incident over which he had no control was to culminate in the dismissal of Ivor Philipps.

On the 9th July, the 113th and 114th Brigades formed up in White Trench ready to attack the wood from the south. In the afternoon the order was cancelled by XV Corps and the bewildered troops were withdrawn to positions behind the broken village of Mametz. 'God knows what it was all about,' wrote David Jones, 'but they moved you back that evening to another field of bivouac'.⁴¹ Hours later they were back again, assembling for the 4.15 attack on 10th July, weary through lack of sleep. In spite of this treatment, when the order to advance was given the troops moved forward down the slope and into a hail of shells and bullets 'with a success that astonished all who knew the ground'.⁴² This was all the more remarkable in that many of the troops had been told that they would be practically unopposed, a situation which one participant⁴³ contrasts with that at Pilkem Ridge a year later when a fully briefed 38th (Welsh) Division fought well alongside the Guards Division and received great praise. For the most part, the advance to the wood was made in good order especially where, as in the centre, full advantage was taken of the model tactics employed by the artillery. But inside the wood inexperience and inadequate briefing began to tell. On the left, far too many troops were packed into the narrow space between the central ridge and Strip Trench⁴⁴ though these were needed beyond the 1st Cross-ridge where the wood broadened out to almost twice its previous width. There the troops had to fan out sideways, keeping their sense of direction. 'A beautiful operation on paper' wrote Glynn Jones, 'showing more text book knowledge than experience, but ridiculous for a wood full of the unknown, and bodies of men completely lost in thick undergrowth and without leaders'.⁴⁵ But in spite of this and of the ease with which the Germans could reinforce the wood from the north and from Sabot and Flatiron copses to the east, the Welsh Division during the course of the day fought its way a mile forward and by evening were in sight of the northern edge and only a few hundred yards from the German second line. Thereafter the battle see-sawed for another 30 hours until the Germans evacuated the wood and the exhausted Welsh troops were relieved.

What can we conclude from a study of the struggle for Mametz Wood?

Firstly, that there was muddle and confusion at all levels of command, though this is not perhaps surprising given that operations on the Somme were on a much larger scale than anything previously attempted, and proper means of controlling the vast forces employed had not been developed. The set piece attacks on 1st and 14th July, although they may appear clumsy now, represented a great tactical advance on 1915, but the fighting between them was far too fragmented and undoubtedly badly handled at Corps level. This combination of penny packets, bad tactics and poor control made success virtually impossible, for example, on 7th July. While separate attacks were being launched on Contalmaison, Mametz Wood and Trones Wood, the rest of the British Army stood still. There was little or no attempt to coordinate the efforts of the units making these attacks, not even at Mametz Wood where two divisions were converging on the same target. On this front too, XV Corps chose methods of attack which had scant regard for the nature of the ground and which resulted in the maximum exposure of British troops to German machine-guns. On top of this, as the attack developed, orders were issued at Corps and Divisional level which had no chance whatever of reaching the troops concerned in time. These were tragic failures, the effects of which still linger on in the maimed bodies of the wounded and in the minds of the bereaved.

But it is easy to be wise after the event and to dissect at leisure decisions which had to be taken hastily in the heat and uncertainty of battle. It is easy, too, to forget how quickly the British Army had grown: from two Army Corps in France in August 1914 to fifteen, less than two years later. Many of the staff were inexperienced and working under great pressure. There was no time to establish mutual trust between Corps HQ and those Divisions which had never previously served the Corps and which were wheeled in and out of the battle every few days. 'Our professional officers', D V Kelly wrote after the war, 'with certain defects and virtues.....were inferior to none, but they were totally inadequate, both in numbers and staff experience for the work of handling millions of men. Why should one expect a man who has never commanded more than a Battalion to make no mistakes in charge of a Division or a Corps'⁴⁶ The British Army fought the Battle of the Somme before it was ready and it could be argued that the battle was lost before it had begun. But war is not a sporting event: commanders cannot make fixtures just when it suits them - they must

react to pressure from the enemy and to demands from their allies. Haig, as we have seen, was reluctant to commit his new armies too soon, but, though he treated it with some reserve, he could not ignore Joffre's cry that the French Army would be destroyed if the British held back. Though 'idealism perished on the Somme'⁴⁷ and the British Army was never to be the same afterwards, it could hardly have been otherwise given the remorseless pressure of events.

Secondly, although it is incidental to the main theme, it is worth pointing out that at Mametz Wood, as elsewhere on the Somme, the main damage to the German army was inflicted by the British artillery. This is something which those who argue that German losses on the Somme could not possibly equal those of the British tend to neglect. They point to the unequal nature of a contest between defenders armed with machine guns and attackers moving over open ground.⁴⁸ But, as we have seen, infantry attacks were sporadic, and though attacking troops had little chance against machine-guns they were exposed only for short periods at a time. At Mametz Wood, for example, the infantry of the 38th Welsh Division faced German machine-guns in the open for a few hours on 7th July and again for a few hours on 10th July. They paid a heavy price for a short period while the Germans were subjected to a torrent of shells night and day. And although their second line was equipped with well-constructed, deep, dug-outs these were mostly used as casualty dressing stations and were not always proof against heavy calibre British shells. Much of the trench works soon crumbled away and many Germans were buried alive as roofs and walls were blown in on them. Corporal Hetschold of the 2nd Machine Gun Company of the Lehr Regiment has described what it was like to suffer in this way. He moved into the second line at Bazentin le Petit on 3rd July while it was being heavily shelled:

A few dugouts were still there. And now these were crushed in.

In the dugout in which I was, 100 comrades soon gathered. It was a strong dugout but after a short barrage it also gave way. First an entrance collapsed and many comrades suffocated. Then a shell landed in the middle and we were thrown hither and thither. As we came to our senses again, there was a dud shell sticking out from under the framework of the dugout. We all took fright but it did not explode. We breathed again. But then the next followed immediately. A fearful rending, all the candles are out, shouts and groans. I can still breathe. I hear my comrades calling. "The long gallery is smashed in right up to us; we must get out". I see two boots, pull hard and manage to free a comrade,

who was already nearly dead. But we can do nothing for the many others; 13 feet of earth lie on them. I shudder. There is no escape here. As we make for the second entrance, the next shell smashes it in. We are buried alive. I feel that I can scarcely get any more air. Then a Pioneer calls: "I will use a detonator quickly. If it succeeds, we are free; if not, the end will come quickly". I call "Don't use explosive! Let us try this way first." There are perhaps five to eight of us still alive. We scratch the earth down with our hands and feet. Dead comrades are unearthed. We press close to the steps. If the earth falls from above we are lost. My hair stands on end. Then - a shout of joy! A small ray of light comes from above. We are saved. Now the hole is big enough to allow head and chest through, and then off to the nearest shell holes.

Only a few comrades are still with me from our company. We stick together like true brothers.⁴⁹

The British seige guns, too, kept up a ceaseless bombardment of depots and supply lines to the rear and the Germans lost heavily trying to get food and water through. It is sometimes argued that German sources play up these losses in order to excuse their own failures but this certainly cannot be said of the historians of the Lehr Regiment who give the figures in some detail and name the officers and NCOs killed and wounded. It is not possible to draw up a balance sheet of the losses on each side of Mametz Wood but there is nothing in the evidence to suggest that the Official History is necessarily wrong (as some maintain) in stating that German losses on the Somme equalled those of the British and French combined.

Finally, what of the 38th (Welsh) Division? Whatever faults there may have been in execution, there can be no doubting now the magnitude of their achievement. Map 15 shows all the woodlands of the Somme. Mametz Wood was the largest and one of the most easily defended, with the German second line just above it on the ridge. Trones Wood was in a like position but, though smaller than Mametz Wood, it remained in German hands until by-passed by the main assault on Bazentin Ridge. Bernafay and the two Bazentin Woods were well forward of any rear defences and fell quickly as a result, though Delville Wood, similarly placed, resisted capture for nearly 6 weeks, falling to the 14th Division on 27th August.⁵⁰ High Wood held out for two months against sustained attacks by a number of divisions. By comparison, the five days which the Welsh Division took to capture Mametz Wood is creditably short and it is understandable that some of the early criticism of the division became muted as the difficulties of woodland fighting became apparent.

The capture of Mametz Wood was not a tidy affair: the fighting was confused and there were moments of near panic with the Welshmen falling back in disarray. Leaderless men dribbled out of the wood looking for directions. The performance did not at first sight perhaps suggest 'one of the most magnificent little armies ever turned out' but the Welsh Division, inexperienced and inadequately trained, pushed the cream of Germany's highly professional army back about one mile, an achievement which ranks with that of any division on the Somme—including the much-vaunted 7th Division.

Addressing reserves for the Welsh Division at Kinnel Park some weeks later, Lloyd George said:

You are proceeding to a great struggle. I know the dangers you have to face. You will face them like men. The men belonging to the division you have the honour to belong to are a credit to their race. They had a very difficult piece of work to do on the Somme in that great battle. They accomplished much with honour to themselves and the land to which they belonged. The attack on Mametz Wood was one of the most difficult enterprises which ever fell to any division. It was left to the Welsh Division, and they swept the enemy out of it. From end to end there is not a living German in the wood now. He has been driven far beyond it, and it will be your task to drive him still further and I think in time you will accomplish it. When I look down upon you I know the gallantry with which your comrades in France have fought, and I bid you God speed.⁵¹

Stripped of rhetoric and bombast, this represents no more than the simple truth, though it ignores the suffering experienced by both sides. The Welsh Division's performance was disappointing only when measured against the unrealistic expectations of higher commands. By any objective measure, it did remarkably well.

NOTES ON CHAPTER FIVE

Epigraph, David Jones, In Parenthesis, 1937 p 164

1. WO 95/431. Fourth Army papers, File A: Fourth Army Operation Orders 1st-31st July 1916 - 'Brief Account of the Operations of the Fourth Army on 14 July 1916'.
2. CAB 45/190. Letter from Gen. Sir A A Montgomery-Massingham, dated 22 April 1931.
3. B H Liddell Hart, History of the First World War, London 1930, p 246.
4. WO 95/431: as note 1.
5. *ibid.*
6. Brig.-Gen. Sir James Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol.2 p 78.
7. WO 95/431 and Official History 1916, Vol. 2, p 85.
8. WO 95/431.
9. Edmonds, Official History, 1916, Vol 2, p 89 (based on German sources).
10. Liddell Hart, History of the First World War, p 248.
11. George A B Dewar and Lt. Col. J.H. Boraston: Sir Douglas Haig's Command, London, 1922, Vol 1, pp 113-116. Boraston wrote the chapter from which quotations are taken.
12. *ibid*, p 113.
13. Rawlinson MS. Item 87d: Kiggell to Rawlinson, 8th July 1916.
14. *ibid*. Journal entry for 7th July 1916.
15. CAB 45/189. Letter from Major G P L Drake-Brockman, 7th Feb. 1930.
16. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol 2 p 16.
17. *ibid* p 17.
18. *ibid* p 65.
19. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol 2. By inspection from Index to Arms, Formations and Units pp 593-4.
20. CAB 45/190. Letter from Brig.-Gen. LAE Price-Davies, 6th March 1930.
21. WO 95/2552, 113th Infantry Brigade War Diary, Appendix 20, (July 1916): message dated 16th July 1916.
22. *ibid*, Appendix 18, dated 23rd July 1916.
23. *ibid*, Appendix 26, dated 20th July 1916: Report by Brig.-Gen. Price-Davies to 38th Division HQ. My italics. No trace can

be found of the original report of 15th July to which Price-Davies refers.

24. CAB 45/189. Letter from Captain J Glynn Jones, 28th April 1930, plus notes.
25. CAB 45/189. Letter from Major Drake-Brockman, plus notes. The notes contain numerous errors, particularly when referring to Corps and battalion numbers, which is not perhaps surprising as they were written nearly 14 years after the events described. Sometimes however the errors are more substantial and cast doubt on his interpretation of particular incidents.

Lt. Col. David Davies (later Lord Davies of Llandinun) was OC 14th RWF not 16th RWF. As Drake-Brockman joined the Division after Davies had left for England his assessment of Davies's capabilities as a battalion commander are based on hearsay.

26. The Times, 11th July 1916.
27. CAB 45/189. Letter from Lt. Col. G H Gwyther OC 14th RWF dated 21st April 1930. Gwyther, however, attributes the mistake to Brigade orders.
28. CAB 45/189. Letter from Captain J Glynn Jones.
29. Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer London 1930 p 71.
30. Gerald Brenan, A Life of One's Own London 1962 pp 205-206.
31. Frank Delamain (Ed.), Going Across: Extracts from the war letters and diary of Lt. St. H. Evans: Newport (undated) p 46.
32. D V Kelly, 39 months, London 1930 (though written in 1919) pp 28-29.
33. Frank Richards, Old Soldiers Never Die London 1933 p 181.
34. Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That. London 1929 p 175 (Penguin edition). The Stinking German corpse prompted the poem 'Dead Boche'.

To you who read my songs of war
And only hear of blood and fame,
I'll say (you've heard it said before)
'War's hell!' and if you doubt the same,
Today I saw in Mametz Wood
A certain cure for lust of blood:

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,
In a great mess of things unclean,
Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk
With clothes and face a sodden green,
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

35. WO 95/2557, 114th Infantry Brigade War Diary.
36. *ibid.* Appendix C, 16th July 1916.
37. CAB 45/190 Letter from Brig.-Gen. Marden, dated 27 March 1930.
38. CAB 45/190. Letter from Maj.-Gen. Pilcher written in 1930.
39. WO 95/2560. 115th Infantry Brigade War Diary, entry for 7th-12th July 1916. *My italics.*
40. CAB 45/189. Letter from Lt. Col. Gwyther.
41. Jones, In Parenthesis, p 148.
42. Ll. Wyn Griffith, Up to Mametz, London 1931, p 207
43. Sgt. T H Davies, 13th RWF, Letter to the author 24 Jan. 1974.
and cf. the cockney character in David Jones, In Parenthesis:

'There was some bastard woods as Jerry was sitting
tight in and this mob had clickt for the job of
asking him to move on - if you please - an' thanks
very much indeed, signally obliged to yer, Jerry-boy'.
44. CAB 45/189. Letter from Lt.Col. Gwyther.
45. *ibid.* Letter from Captain Glynn Jones.
46. Kelly, 39 months. p 158.
47. A J P Taylor, The First World War, London 1963 (Penguin edition, 1966), p 140.
48. *ibid.*
49. Mulmann und Mohs, Geschichte des Lehr Infanterie Regiments,
Thuringen 1935 pp 319-320.
50. Edmonds, Official History 1916 Vol 2 p.204
51. The Times. 21st August 1916.

Senior officers proceeding overseas with 38th (Welsh) Division*DIVISIONAL HQ:

Commander: Maj.-Gen. Ivor Philipps DSO
 ADC's : Lieut. G. Lloyd George
 Lieut D.M. Mein
 GSOL : Lt. Col. H.E. ap Rhys Pryce CMG.

113th INF. BDE

Commander: Brig.-Gen. A.E. Price-Davies VC DSO
 Bde. Major: Capt. H. R. Bentley

13th RWF

In Command: Lt.Col. O.S. Flower
 Major R.O. Campbell (2i/c)
 Major O.J. Bell

14th RWF

In Command: Lt. Col. D. Davies
 Major G.H. Gwyther (2i/c)

15th RWF

In Command: Lt. Col. R.C. Bell
 Major H.V.R. Hodson (2i/c)
 Major J. Edwards

16th RWF

In Command: Lt. Col. R.J.W. Carden
 Major H.M. Richards (2i/c)
 Major F.R.H. McLellan

110th INF BDE

Commander: Brig.-Gen. T.O. Marden CMG
 Bde. Major: Capt. C.H.R. Crawshaw

10th WELSH

In Command: Lt. Col. P.E. Ricketts MVO
 Major M.A. Napier (2i/c)
 Major F.C. Coath

13th WELSH

In Command: Lt. Col. W.C. Giffard DSO
 Major G.D. Edwards (2i/c)
 Major C.E. Bond

14th WELSH

In Command: Lt. Col. L.R. King
 Major J.H. Hayes (2i/c)
 Major D.B. Williams

15th WELSH

In Command: Lt. Col. T.W. Parkinson
 Major W.S.R. Cox (2i/c)
 Major J.K. Williams

* Source WO95/2539

115th INF. BDE

Commander: Brig.-Gen. H.J. Evans
Bde. Major: Capt. C.L. Veal

17th RWF

In Command: Lt. Col. J.A. Ballard
Major H.T. Walker (2i/c)

10th SWB

In Command: Lt. Col. Sir H. Greenwood Bart⁺
Major C.D. Harvey (2i/c)
Major T.H. Morgan

11th SWB

In Command: Lt. Col. J.R. Gaussen DSO
Major D. Grant Dalton (2i/c)

16th WELSH

In Command: Lt. Col. F.H. Gaskell
Major F.W. Smith
Major T. Cochran

19th WELSH (PIONEERS)

In Command: Lt. Col. S.J. Wilkinson
Major A.E.S. Fennell
Major R. Lloyd George

+ Returned almost immediately to England

UNIT TO WHICH ATTACHED	DECEMBER 1915												JANUARY 1916																							
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11			
GUARDS DIVISION	← 16TH RWF →												← 14TH RWF →												← 17TH RWF →											
	← 13TH RWF →												← 15TH RWF →												← 10TH SWB →											
	← 1 COY. 19TH PIONEERS →												← 1 COY. 19TH PIONEERS →																							
19TH (WESTERN) DIVISION	← 15TH WELSH →												← 14TH WELSH →												← 11TH SWB →											
	← 10TH WELSH →												← 13TH WELSH →												← 16TH WELSH →											
													← 2 COYS. 19TH PIONEERS →																							

ANNEX B. PROGRAMME OF ATTACHMENTS TO DIVISIONS IN THE FRONT LINE.

(SOURCE : WO95/2539)

ANNEX C.

113th INF.BDE.

OPERATION ORDER 100*

MANOEUVRES

Ref.: Sheet 36b 1/40,000

1. The Brigade will capture the enemy's 2nd line system between the points U3b-0.34c and the 3rd line system between the points U.4c and U.4b. These objectives are to be regarded as strictly limited except that commanders should extend to their flanks to secure their position should the attack of troops on their flank or flanks fail, or lose direction.
2. The 2nd line system will be attacked by the 13th battalion RWF on the right, and the 16th battalion RWF on the left.
3. This attack will leave the German 1st line system at 2 pm in 8 lines at 30 paces distance in accordance with the organisation already issued. Four Machine Guns will accompany the sixth line.
4. When information has been received that the above objective has been reached, the 14th and 15th battalions RWF on the right and left respectively will leave the German front line system in artillery formation. Before leaving the valley in rear of the 2nd line system, lines will be formed (as already stated), and the advance will move over the 2nd line system to the attack of the 3rd line system. 4 Machine Guns will accompany this attack.
6. The artillery will lift 15 minutes after this attack leaves the valley in rear of the 2nd line system. Every means of sending this information back must be employed, as smoke, etc. may present the advance being actually seen.
7. 8 Machine Guns will be used to provide overhead fire to support the attacks and will form a reserve in the hands of the Brigadier.
8. All positions gained will be consolidated. One section of RE will be sent forward to each battalion after it has gained its objective.
9. It is important that touch should be maintained both laterally and from front to rear. All ranks will watch for runners and assist them, and forward their messages if they become casualties. Runners will wear white arm-bands.

2 runners from each battalion will report for duty at Brigade Headquarters at 1 pm.

10. Watches will be synchronised at 10.15am at Brigade Headquarters. (In theory only; it will actually be done at the Conference at 10.15am).
11. Reports will be sent to cross roads at U.31.b.6.4., where Brigade Headquarters will be situated at first. Brigade Headquarters will be advanced as the situation allows.
12. Attention is directed to instructions already issued (BM6194).
13. The 129th Field Ambulance will establish a Dressing Station in MONCHY LE BRETON.
14. Battalions taking prisoners will arrange to escort them back to Brigade Headquarters. Escorts should be in a strength of 1 to 10 prisoners.
15. 113th Trench Mortar Battery will send one Stokes Gun forward in rear of each battalion. Remainder of Battery to remain in Reserve in 1st line German trenches.

22nd June 1916.

(Sgd.) H Hodson, Major
for Brigade Major
113th Infantry Brigade.

ANNEX D

38th (WELSH) DIVISION ORDER No. 39

9th July 1916

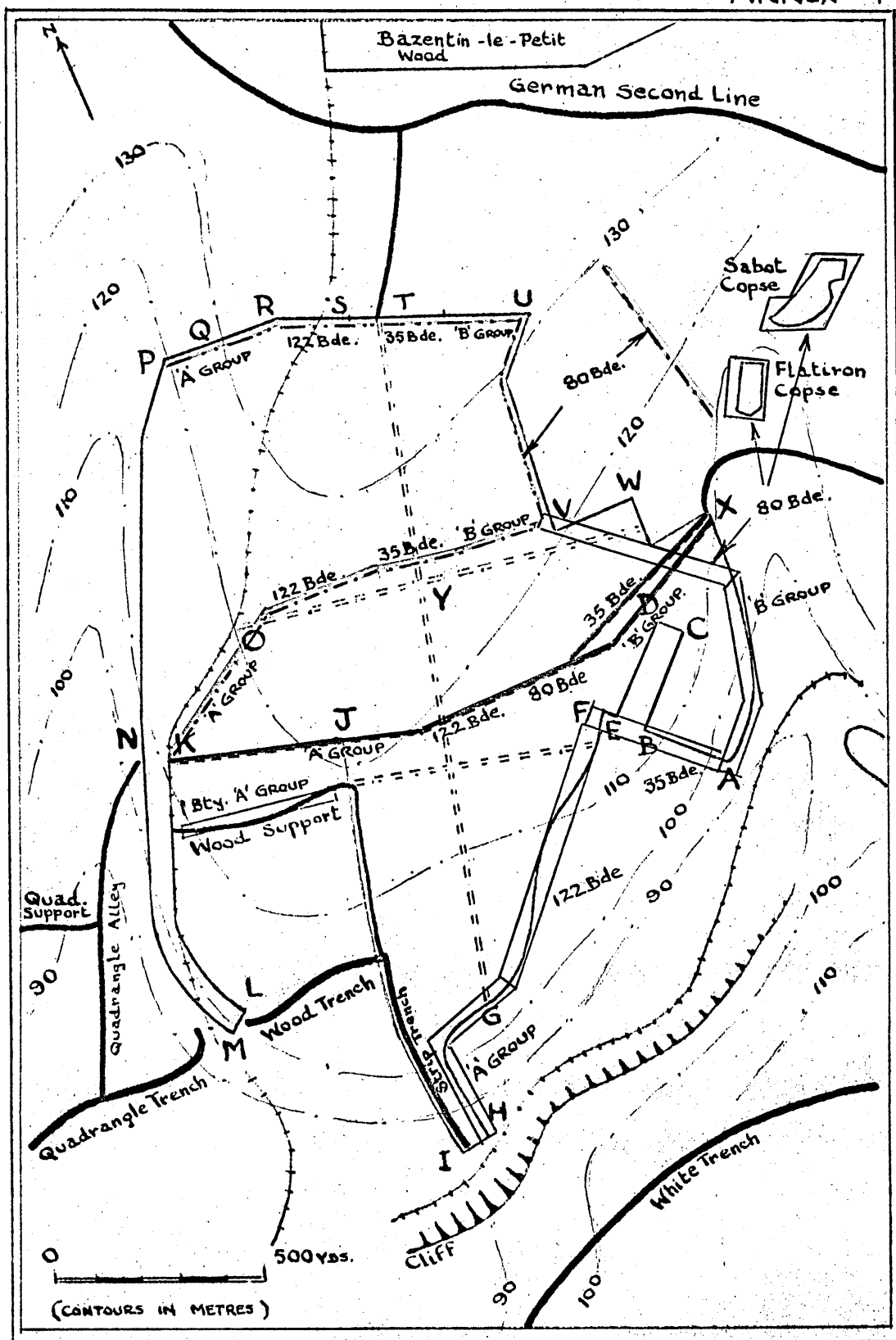
1. The Division will attack MAMETZ WOOD to-morrow with a view to capturing the whole of it. Throughout the operation the left of the 114th Infantry Brigade, and the right of the 113th Infantry Brigade will be on the main ride running North and South through the MAMETZ WOOD.
The 17th Division will co-operate by bombing up QUADRANGLE SUPPORT and WOOD SUPPORT.
The hour of the Infantry assault on the edge of the wood will be 4.15 am, but all troops will be ready in position by 3 am.
2. From 3.30 am to 4.15 am the Artillery will bombard the Southern portion of MAMETZ WOOD, especially the edge of the Wood J.H.G.E. B.A.X.
3. At 3.55 am a smoke barrage will be formed in the neighbourhood of STRIP TRENCH and at A.R.C.X., and will be continued for 30 minutes.
4. At 4.15 am the Artillery will lift gradually to a barrage North and West of the J.F. line - D - X, maintaining a barrage on WOOD SUPPORT, and (under cover of the smoke barrage) the 114th Infantry Brigade will attack the front X.A.G., and the 113th Infantry Brigade will attack between G and STRIP TRENCH, pushing on to the first objective - a line just short of the ride running East from WOOD SUPPORT - and B.C.X. Strong points will be immediately made near A.B.C.X., Eastern edge of ride near the main central ride at X.24.c., 5.8 and at Junction of WOOD TRENCH with STRIP TRENCH, and Eastern edge of WOOD SUPPORT.
5. At 6.15 am the Artillery barrage will lift to the line W.V.Y.O. and K, and the Infantry will capture and consolidate the line, making strong points at V.Y.O. and K.
6. At 7.15 am the Artillery barrage will be lifted to North edge of the Wood U to P, and the Infantry will advance and consolidate themselves inside the North edge of the Wood, making strong points near U.T.S.R.A. and P.
7. At 8.15 am. the Artillery barrage will be lifted on to the German second line.
8. Throughout the operation Machine Gun fire will be directed from MARLBORO' WOOD and CATERPILLAR WOOD in a North Westerly direction against MIDDLE ALLEY to prevent communication between the German second line and MAMETZ WOOD. This area will also be kept under constant Artillery fire.
9. Three Heavy Trench Mortars in QUEENS NULLAH and the Medium Trench Mortars in CLIFF TRENCH will assist the attack against STRIP TRENCH. Care should be taken as regards WOOD TRENCH which is occupied by the 17th Division up to within 50 yards of its junction with STRIP TRENCH.

9. G.O.C. 113th Infantry Brigade will arrange for close and constant communication with the Right Battalion of the 17th Division. A heavy mortar will be placed in position to-day to bombard the portion of the Wood A. B.C.X. G.O.C. 114th Infantry Brigade will also place light mortars to assist in bombarding this portion of the Wood.
10. The 124th Fd. Coy. R.E. and 2 Companies Pioneers have been placed at the disposal of the G.O.C. 113th Inf. Brigade to make strong points and dig a trench from STRIP TRENCH to CLIFF TRENCH.
151st Fd. Coy. R.E. and Pioneers less two Companies are placed at the disposal of G.O.C. 114th Inf. Brigade to make strong points, and a communication trench from neighbourhood of CATERPILLAR WOOD to MAMETZ WOOD. 123rd Fd. Coy. R.E. will be in reserve at present billets (F.28.b., 1.6.)
11. The 115th Infantry Brigade less two Companies at CATERPILLAR WOOD will be in reserve near MINDEN POST.
12. C.R.E. will arrange for necessary R.E. material being brought up rapidly as required from depots at QUEENS NULLAH, and CATERPILLAR WOOD, 115th Infantry Brigade furnishing carrying parties as required. DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS will be informed by C.R.E. of the numbers used as carriers.
13. G.O.C. 113th Inf. Brigade will form an ammunition, ration and water depot near QUEENS NULLAH, and G.O.C. 114th Infantry Brigade similar depots by WHITE TRENCH and CATERPILLAR WOOD.
14. All men must be carefully instructed in the compass direction of the advance, and of the necessity for consolidation and re-organisation when the various rides and edges of the wood are reached. Care must be taken also to instruct in the advantage of working up as close as possible to the edge of our Artillery barrage, and it should be explained to the men that Artillery fire will sound much louder in the wood than outside. To help the men in knowing which is the main central ride, G.O.C. 113th Infantry Brigade will arrange for a party to place red flags along it. 25 flags will be issued to representatives of the Bde. at the HALTE at 9 pm to-day.
15. Brigadiers and Battalion Commanders will ensure that adequate arrangements have been made for inter-communication by visual and runners, as well as by wire. Immediate reports will be sent when each objective has been gained, otherwise hourly reports must be furnished of the progress being made. Negative reports required.


(Signed) H E Pryce
Lieut.Col.
General Staff 38th (Welsh) Division


ACKNOWLEDGE


Issued at: -5.30 p.m.




MAP 16. MAMETZ WOOD 10TH JULY.: ARTILLERY TARGETS.

PRELIMINARY BOMBARDMENT :  03.30 TO 04.15

LIFT BACK AT 04.15 TO : 

LIFT BACK AT 06.15 TO : 

LIFT BACK AT 07.15 TO : 

} AT 50 YDS/MIN.

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Cpl. G H Crick (14 Welsh); Pte. J E Davies (13 RWF);
Sgt. T H Davies (13 RWF); Pte. E M Edwards (14 RWF);
Capt. Ll.W. Griffith (15 RWF); Pte. H Iball (13 RWF);
Pte. D Jones (15 RWF); Pte. E Jones (16 Welsh);
Pte. G J Jones (16 RWF); Pte. W B Joshua (16 Welsh);
Pte G C Longworth; Sgt. R Lyons (14 Welsh); Pte. R N
Morgan (16 Welsh); Drummer L E Morley (11 SWB);
Pte. A Parry (16 RWF); Sgt. T J Price (13 Welsh);
A F Richards (16 Welsh); L/Cpl. T G Richards (16 Welsh);
Sgt. M R Roberts (14 RWF); 2nd Lieut. R G Robinson
(13 Welsh); C B Thomas (RFA); Pte. P S Williams
(14 RWF).

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431 Fourth Army. General Staff
881 XI Corps General Staff
921 XV Corps, General Staff
1631 7th Division. General Staff
1639 " " Commander, Royal Artillery
1643 " " 22nd and 35th Brigades RFA.
1981 17th Division General Staff
1998 " " 50th Inf. Bde. HQ
2005 " " 51st Inf. Bde. HQ
2009 " " 52nd Inf. Bde. HQ

2130	21st Division	General Staff
2151	"	" 62nd Inf. Bde. HQ
2159	"	" 64th Inf. Bde. HQ
2163	"	" 100th Inf. Bde. HQ

2539	38th Division	General Staff
2542	"	Commander Royal Artillery
2551)	"	"
2)	"	113th Inf. Bde HQ
2555	"	113th Inf. Bde: 13 & 14th RWF
2556	"	" " " 15 & 16 RWF
2557	"	114th Inf. Bde HQ
2559	"	114th Inf. Bde 10th, 13th, 14th, 15th Welsh
2560	"	115th Inf. Bde HQ
2561	"	115th Inf. Bde 17th RWF, 16th Welsh
2562	"	" " " 10th & 11th SWB

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